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The first authorized, intimate, personal story of American witches—their lives, loves, beliefs and magical practices

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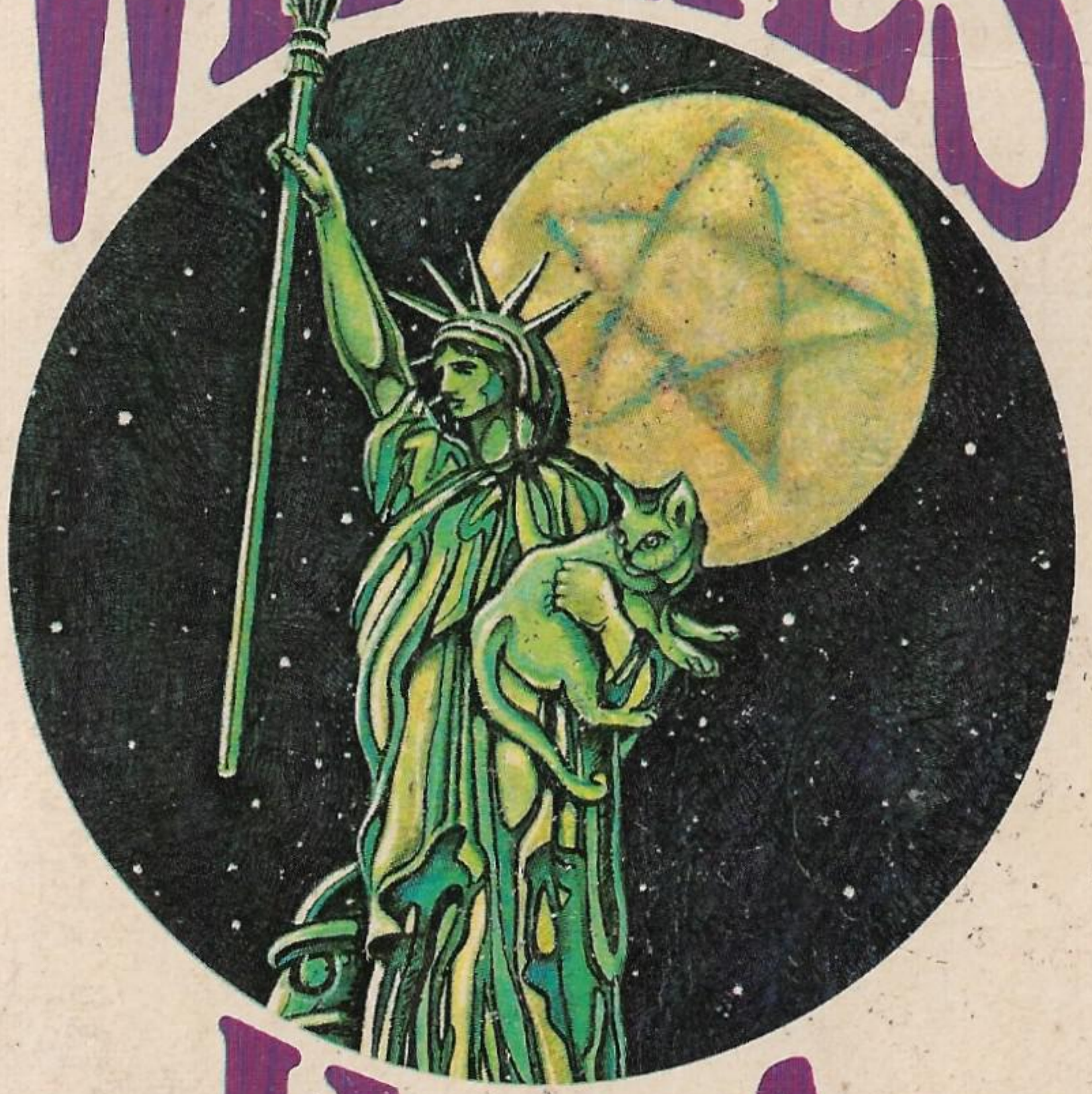
WITCHES U.S.A.



by Susan Roberts

WOULD YOU RECOGNIZE A WITCH FACE TO FACE?

Chances are you wouldn't. It might be a man or a woman, a friend or a lover, even a husband or a wife—yet little if anything would give you a clue.

After centuries of persecution, witches have learned to conceal their true identities, their occult beliefs and uncanny powers. They have learned how to move undetected through a hostile world.

Never before, however, have there been so many witches, and their numbers grow with every passing day. Now at last the time has arrived when witches have dared to reveal their presence. Now at last you can learn more than anyone outside the charmed covens ever has been privileged to know—as told by the remarkable woman who has become the trusted confidante of the leading witches in America today.

ALSO BY SUSAN ROBERTS

YOGI COOK BOOK
(with Yogi Vithaldas)

WITCHES, U.S.A.

SUSAN ROBERTS

A DELL BOOK

For Susan and Laura

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Prologue

All the witches who appear in this book are real. They are entirely the product of my research, not my imagination. Any similarity to fictional people or situations is unintentional.

However, along the research way, I did pick up some unsavory characters who may or may not be imaginary. That is for the reader to decide. Witches certainly believe in them and the damage they are capable of doing.

The reader will meet these characters, too.

My witch friends often tell me that they have been reluctant to discuss openly their religious beliefs and their involvement in acts of magic because they don't want even one innocent person, lacking psychic expertise, to be emotionally shot down by a psychic gangster. They consider this to be a distinct danger.

Natural curiosity plus a good imagination, even without deliberate conjuration, is often powerful enough to provoke a nightmare visit from an uninvited demon, they warn. Since they hold themselves responsible for this book and its content, they do not want its publication to weaken any cracks in the protection most of us were born with.

For that reason, those same witches blessed this book while it was still in manuscript form. By this, I mean they told me they have physically sterilized it against demons. The reader, therefore, is immunized.

Witches, however, are sophisticated enough to know that inquisitiveness is a major ingredient of human nature. They also know from their own experiences that warnings and protections often merely whet the curiosity of the occultly adventurous.

So, they have also worked out a special do-it-yourself ritual, authentic in all details, which anyone can use when —and if—curiosity roams too far afield and a fast slide back to the safety zone is needed.

They call it a "Self-Blessing." It appears here, unedited, in the epilogue, for ready reference.

—SUSAN ROBERTS

1. Witch is Which?

The little brown bottle fills up fast.

A clove of garlic, a few peppercorns, drops from a vial labeled "Uncrossing Oil," a camphor ball, a sprinkle of shavings from the horn of a stag, a splash of vinegar, a measure of ammonia . . . and a few other things I am unable to identify.

It is nearly midnight. There are only two other people in this New York apartment. The host is a witch, the other person a client. I am a guest.

Now into the bottle go narrow slips of folded paper. On each is a name, handwritten by the witch. Before they are dropped, one at a time, there is a moment of silent concentration. The witch's lips move in an inaudible incantation. When the last slip is in the bottle, the top is screwed on and the bottle turned upside down. A candle, black clear through to the wick, is lit. A few of its drippings anchor the candle to the bottom of the bottle. It burns there for fifteen minutes. During that time, no one says a word. The flame is then pinched out, the witch relaxes, smiles and begins instructions to his client.

"Every day for fifteen minutes, this candle must be burned just as you have seen me do it here. By the time the candle is gone, you will *know* who your enemy is."

Thirteen people meet somewhere in California.

Twelve now form a nine-foot human circle. The thirteenth is in the middle. All are robed, shoulder to floor, in white velvet. Cowls conceal their heads.

One creamy, fat candle burns in the background, sil-

houetting the group. It is the only illumination. Spasmodically, the wick twitches and the flame sputters. It is the only sound.

The witches' cone of power has been raised. It is about to be released for the protection of a member.

In Philadelpha, a man and his wife sit silently in their living room. They are, strange as it may seem, in deep communication. She holds a letter. This single sheet of paper informs them that, beyond a question of a doubt in their own minds, certain of the secrets they share have been pilfered and sold by a woman they both know who now lives in southern California. She spent the money, they learned, to buy stereo equipment—some $1,000 worth. Still silent, the wife rises and lights a brown candle. The husband continues to sit, but now he is intently shaping a lump of clay with his fingers.

Ten more minutes pass before she sighs, snuffs out the candle, and says, "OK, sweetie, bedtime. I'll leave the dishes for morning."

By now, he has shaped the clay to the rough form of a woman. He places it carefully to the left of the candle and, together, they leave the room. These witches are attempting to prevent that woman they know from enjoying the money she has received. They do not know *how* this will come about. They are only certain that it will.

Some of my best friends are witches. Right now, all over America, they are worshiping their gods and practicing their magic, just as others before them have done secretly for many, many thousands of years. These men and women I have grown to know so well tell me that, at long last—after three centuries of Christian persecution, followed by another two hundred years of silence on their part—they now hope for a witchcraft renaissance.

"Renaissance" is a big word. They use it hopefully, tentatively—not boastfully. They know perfectly well that the Renaissance period most of us were taught about in school is a glamour word used to encompass those years when

civilization moved from the medieval to the modern age.

From their own gut history, however, they also remember that this was also the period of man's history when witchcraft was beaten down as a religion and left for dead. And so, when they use the word "renaissance," they are not speaking of the fads of today—or even of tomorrow—but of the influence they hope to have on the history of the next two hundred years when man should evolve from the modern age to the spiritual one.

Before this can come about, however, they believe they must first rid themselves of the Satanic image they inherited from those years of the witchcraft hunts.

It's Tuesday in Toledo. Tonight, the moon is full.

An elderly man with thinning white hair and a wispy goatee stands in front of a mottled mirror. An antiquated barber chair piled high with junk and casually covered by a cloth throw is directly behind him.

He is wearing a black business suit, white shirt and black string tie. When he leans forward to peer into the mirror, his trousers hike up over his laced black high-topped shoes, exposing white cotton socks.

Intent on his reflected image, he is fitting pink plastic horns onto either side of his receding hairline. Each horn is held in place by suction. Satisfied at last by the symmetry he has achieved, he smiles at himself in the mirror and turns to leave the room. When he returns, he is wearing a knee-length black satin cape over his suit.

He is ready now for his role as High Priest of his Satanic cult. He considers himself a witch.

Witches, however, flatly deny any bond with Satanists. They insist that the terms are not, and never have been, synonymous, although they are commonly used that way. They call this confusion a hangover from the Middle Ages when anyone who did not follow the teachings of the Christian Church could be declared a devil worshiper and killed.

At this point in witch history, as long as they have de-

cided to emerge warily from the safety of their underground and tell it like it is—for them—they are first of all determined to divorce themselves from the Satanists for all time.

Today Satanism, to a witch, stands for black magic, while witchcraft represents white. I am stating this for the time being in the broadest sense; I'll narrow the concept down later.

As one woman told me after our friendship warmed to open candor, "You know, Susan, long before you start to unravel the threads of black and white magic and get down to the warp and woof, you should make it very clear before you start that we are not hell-bent on a Mafialike revenge against the Church or the Satanists. Some few individuals may be, of course. We don't even necessarily believe that Satanism should be annihilated. And that may surprise a lot of people in the world who don't know what we're all about and what we do stand for."

She was right. This surprised me.

"After all," she continued, swiftly adopting the pungency witches often use to flavor their observations, "the lilies of the field grow in shit. Trouble is, the majority of people just don't like to think of lilies in the realistic terms of nature. They have no feeling whatsoever for universal balance. Human or plant. So, they swivel their eyeballs to heaven and pray for deliverance from *all* the nasties."

Witches, she went on to explain, may not believe in extracting an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But they do engage in a running battle of tit for tat in order to maintain a balance of power between white and black magic. They even enjoy it.

We'll get into details on this and other points later on. Right now, I want to throw out some general observations for a very good reason of my own. I still remember only too well how I was constantly being diverted from an understanding of what all these witches were trying to tell me until I was able to blot my own preconceived notions out of my head.

Now, apart from the witch concept of good versus evil, they are now mildly preoccupied with two brand-new Electronic Age distortions and want to nip these in the bud.

Here is how they see—and react—to them.

When they view the current rash of men and women who, having read a book or two, flamboyantly embrace witchcraft, race out to buy a cape and then publicly proclaim themselves superwitches, they are highly entertained.

"We all gather our nuts and fruits in season," one remarked blithely. "I figure it's just another sign from heaven that the time of the witch has come again."

On a more serious side, they do point out that they, themselves, have been formally trained and initiated into witchcraft, just as Christians and Jews are confirmed into their religions. This phase of attracting faddists is a minor flurry in their history, they feel. This, too, will pass.

They are far more concerned about young kids who, lumping witchcraft with all mysticism, light another joint or drop another pill and exclaim, "Wow! That's my thing!"

Another witch, who has determined to spend the rest of her life working with young people who are searching for spiritual values, told me this: "Marijuana euphoria or acid and speed visions have no place in witchcraft. Let me put it this way. I can hang travel posters on my wall and enjoy them. But it doesn't mean I've been there. It's the same thing with drug- or even alcohol-induced psychic experiences. Poor substitutes for the real thing."

Witches aren't moralists on the subject of drinking or smoking pot. Some do both, but for fun, not enlightenment. Nor do they believe insight lies in LSD or other hallucinogens. There may be exceptions to this rule, but none of the witches I know will accept a candidate for training no matter how qualified he may be until he has been off acid for at least a year.

From my own experience, I should say right now that I've met a lot of hip witches, but I have yet to meet a hippie witch.

The truth is, the hard-core, main-line witches (terms they freely apply to themselves) I have grown to know so well are mostly middle-class Americans who, on the surface, live quietly and unobtrusively in the mainstream of American life. I found this to be literally true: You can't tell a witch by the looks of one.

These witches I am writing about are—with reason—a reticent bunch. They no longer fear legal persecution (the last of the Witchcraft Acts was repealed in England in 1951). But they are still leery of subtle social discrimination if not outright ostracism. Some requested that their identities be disguised. They are people who work in ordinary jobs—beauticians, commercial artists, social workers, accountants, engineers, photographers, teachers, travel agents, secretaries, clerks, to name a few. They are frankly afraid of losing their jobs, their housing and even their credit ratings if their religious beliefs, which are essentially pagan, become publicly known. Some say they have had such experiences and once was quite enough.

Others I know, who are self-employed or members of the armed forces, don't hold such fears and are willing to explain—and defend—their religion if, by so doing, this will help gain modern understanding of their quite sincere beliefs and practices.

Before witches are willing to talk about the complications of their craft, they like to give their own definitions of the terms they use among themselves and correct a few minor misinterpretations.

For instance, one of the first things I learned from them is that the word "witch," as they use it, derives from an Old English word *wicca*, meaning "wise one."

As for covens, today, witches do meet in groups they call covens, although no one is certain whether or not this has always been done. A coven is limited to thirteen members. It can—and often does—function with fewer members, but never more. Because their religious rites are largely based on the personal involvement of each member, group harmony is essential to any group act. They seem to feel that beyond that number such harmony is diluted. Therefore, when membership nudges that limit, they begin to consider a split, a regrouping, a new coven.

Each coven is headed by a priest or priestess. This appears to be a matter of natural selection, not an in-group campaign among the members for election to the role. The person who has the soundest knowledge or who possesses the greatest psychic power automatically becomes the leader. I also learned that, in America at least, many

witches do not coven at all, but practice their religion and magic as individuals after they have been initiated.

Witches do not use the word "warlock." It has no meaning at all to any initiated witch I have ever met. Warlock is defined as a male witch. Another witch friend of mine, a professor of history at a large Eastern university, told me that the word came into the vocabulary by way of Scotland and was popularized through the writings of Sir Walter Scott.

Witches love it when any man calls himself a warlock and get an extra charge when, in all innocence, he boasts of it in their presence. They claim it is a sure mark of the phony. Male or female, to them a witch is a witch. This refusal on their part to differentiate between the sexes was, incidentally, my first clue that witches consider most of the currently popularized male-versus-female skirmishes for identity a "meaningless barrage of sociological sewerage," as one tart-tongued witch phrased it.

"A human being has to be an emotional contortionist to live within any society that doesn't provide plenty of leeway for all individual souls—men and women—to expand and grow to the fullest possible potential without freaking out," he complained. "It is assumed, but not by witches, that all of our social, political and moral structures are right and the people who don't fit them are badly adjusted. But do we analyze our institutions? Rarely. Instead, we analyze people and judge them by their ability to fit."

Other witches, agreeing with him, add that they realize equality battles—sexual or racial—are very real and very painful for the men and women involved. Here again, they consider such a struggle as inevitable, deplorable and destructive a by-product of twentieth-century culture as air and water pollution.

Although witches are forced to breathe the same air and drink the same water as the rest of us do, they try to eliminate "role playing" from their own personal life styles. They do this quietly and without fanfare.

Most witches, as I have already noted, appear to the world to be conventional men and women. They fit themselves into society as comfortably as they can.

In the privacy of their own homes, however, they live in a witch world.

How did my friendships with these people start? What piqued my interest in witchcraft in the first place? Looking back, as far as I can figure out from extensive reading, anyone who has ever set out to write a book about these elusive human beings has done so because of a scholarly interest in, or a long personal fascination with, the subject itself.

Not I. Two years ago—as far as I know—I had never met a witch . . . now I am beginning to wonder.

My first conscious involvement with witches was purely coincidental. I was to learn that witches don't believe in coincidence. But I didn't know that when I first met Joe Lukach at a dinner party.

Our meeting was ordinary enough. During the course of the evening, we exchanged pleasantries, nothing more.

After that, we began to meet each other at different parties, and, quickly discovering we had fun together, I added his name to my list of people to ask for drinks and dinner and he added mine to his.

I soon learned from the casual gossip of mutual friends that he read the Tarot. I saw nothing particularly unusual in this. When my oldest daughter was in high school, she and her friends experimented briefly with the occult. Once they bought a pack of Tarot cards and a book of instructions and spent hours laying them out in various patterns.

The kids were soon baffled by the complexity of the Tarot and, abandoning them, returned to reading Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet* and collecting science fiction paperbacks.

Joe, however, was reputed to be very skilled at interpreting the Tarot. When he finally confided that he had developed his own occult ability to the point where he now earned his living as a psychic teacher and advisor and used the Tarot as one of his basic tools, I did not find this a particularly startling piece of information, either.

At the time I met him, I had just finished writing *The*

Yogi Cookbook in collaboration with Yogi Vithaldas. During the preparation of that book, the Yogi had quite naturally introduced me to many phases of the occult from his own viewpoint as an Eastern mystic. The Tarot—except for my daughter's amateurish efforts—was merely a new aspect of mysticism as far as I was concerned.

When I asked Joe if he would read for me, he agreed, knowing I was only curious and not gripped with life-or-death problems. This is the way my life was then: Both of my daughters were living in Paris. I wanted to know whether they would settle as expatriates or return to New York. He told me they would return within the year. (They did.) He also predicted some problems I would have with a writing assignment. (Forewarned, I was later able to handle with ease a situation which might otherwise have developed into a nasty scene.)

There was nothing spectacular in either event. Nor do I believe the Tarot reading influenced the outcome of either. But when it came to the subject that interested me most—a novel I was enthusiastic about writing—Joe was noncommittal. "It looks promising," was the best I could wring from him—or the cards.

So much for my Tarot reading. I completed the research for the novel, did an outline and wrote two chapters. At this point, my agent and I agreed it was time to negotiate a contract. On a day in July we had a conference.

Later that same afternoon, at loose ends, I called Joe to ask him again about my proposed book. I was, quite frankly, seeking assurance. He, also at loose ends, impulsively suggested that I come over for dinner so we could discuss it further.

We had a pleasant evening. Over coffee, Joe told me he had a "psychic feeling" the book would do well enough and then, more or less as an afterthought, asked, "Susan, have you ever thought of writing a book about American witches?"

"No," I said. "I haven't. Why?"

Joe laughed and poured more coffee. "I'm a witch, you know." That declaration was delivered so casually, I immediately assumed he was putting me on.

"Are you?" I asked somewhat lamely, in no mood for teasing. How did he expect me to respond? With a breathless, "Gee whiz! Really?"

"I'm perfectly serious," he said at once, obviously sensitive to my reaction. I was too polite to come right out and say I didn't believe him.

"You don't believe me, do you?" he persisted.

"I think you're kidding me," I finally admitted.

"I'm not. No reason why you should take it seriously, though. Most people don't. Very few people even know I'm a witch. The truth is, there are thousands of us. And nothing has ever been written about us—as we *really* are."

"You *are* serious," I answered.

"Completely," he responded.

"Then tell me what you mean by being a witch," I asked.

"Nope," he said. "If you ever decide you want to write about witchcraft, then I'll be glad to help you. But not before. I'd just be catering to idle curiosity."

"You brought the subject up," I reminded him.

"I just wanted to let you know I'd be willing to talk—if and when."

I was intrigued enough to make a mental note right then and there to discuss the idea as a book possibility with my agent as soon as I finished the novel.

The next morning at 9:30 my agent called.

"Susan," he said, with absolutely no preliminary greeting, "have you ever thought of writing a book about American witches?"

From my end, there was a long silence.

"As a matter of fact," I told him, when I was absolutely certain I had heard him correctly, "last night I had dinner with a man who claims he is a witch—and he asked me the same thing."

It was his turn to observe a moment of silence.

"You mean," he said slowly, "you *know* one?"

And that is the way this book was conceived.

The publisher wanted such a book; they called that particular agent who represents many writers; he, in turn, thought of me as the writer. A coincidence or a series of them.

My novel? By that afternoon, all of my work on it was filed away and I had plunged into a study of witchcraft.

Joe was as good as his word. He was unstinting with his time—and his patience. And, as soon as I felt knowledgeable enough to ask questions, he not only answered them as freely as possible, he began to invite—one at a time—friends of his to have dinner with us. This was an initial surprise; some of them I had casually met before. Now I saw them as witches as well as Joe's close friends. He told them it was all right for them to drop their social guards and speak freely.

I soon knew that in the months to follow I would attempt to interview as many witches from as many parts of the country and from as many walks of life as it would be possible for me to meet.

Finding them was not the major problem.

Meeting the first one was the most difficult step, and I had already accomplished this before I even got started. Then, of course, I had met the members of Joe's coven. After that, it worked something like a bucket brigade. One witch passes you on to another in another coven. This, however, does not imply endorsement of your purpose or guarantee any form of equal cooperation down the line. But it does help a lot. Each and every one of them makes up his own mind in his own time as to how far he wishes to go when it comes to taking you into his confidence, if he wishes to do so at all. In that respect, every single meeting is an entirely new encounter.

All such an introduction does is to allow you to say "Hello" and to know that you are speaking to one witch who has been vouched for by another.

Granted, Joe had told me many things, but he also made it clear that he and his friends were speaking to me as individual witches. I did not question their sincerity. But their beliefs? I had no way of ascertaining whether or not

they, as a group of sophisticated New Yorkers, were unique or if, indeed, their views were generally shared by other witches across the country.

With that in mind, it remained for me to arrive at my own basic approach as I met the other witches. Several avenues were open to me. Which would best accomplish my purpose?

As a devil's advocate? This is always the most satisfying solution. The writer is not burdened by convictions. I was not. There is the sheer joy of being able to take first one point of view and then the other, secure in the knowledge that when the results are published, you are certain to emerge as being very learned. It gives you the opportunity to squeeze every ounce of information from one source and then frame your information in the form of questions to be asked your next source.

This approach had one fatal flaw. By this time, I knew from Joe and his friends that witches do not even believe in the Devil, and so the very term "devil's advocate" made me laugh. More seriously, even my preliminary investigations led me to believe that witches are probably far more skilled than I at this technique of playing provocateur. Certainly they are better informed. What other routes were open?

As a skeptic? To me, there is a very fine line between skepticism and cynicism. Lawyers balance this perfectly when they pose their classic question: "When did you stop beating your wife?"

Such trick questions have not been lost to journalism. Nor do I mean to imply that this technique of applied skepticism is worthless or even unethical. Artfully and deliberately applied, it has been known to sting some reasonably honest answers from men and women who would otherwise be intent on giving you a snow job, if not outright lies.

I gave up that approach with some reluctance. I clung to it for some time, however, for a very well-grounded reason: I am skeptical by nature. But common sense already told me that witches simply do not give a damn whether or not you—or I—believe in them or their magic. They have nothing to prove to anyone. For this reason

alone, the sting of my skepticism would be totally blunted. So I seriously considered the other extreme:

As a believer? This was frequently suggested to me by people I know who have read a lot about witchcraft. "Get into a coven," they urged. Looking back on it, I realize now that this suggestion invariably came from those who play on the fringes of witchcraft and want to get at the core of it without a moral commitment.

So did I, of course, but instinct alone told me that presenting myself as a serious candidate could only lead to trouble. Aside from any ethical questions I might hold on that approach, I just didn't think I could get by with it. Joining a coven is not all that simple. I knew that to be true of Joe's group. I was to learn that even the most loosely organized ones have built-in protections from just such infiltrations. Assuming that it could be done, there was another important consideration: Was a resort to trickery necessary? Was I trying to write an "exposé" of an evil practice?

That had been done to death, far too often in the quite literal sense, so I vetoed that approach. What I really wanted to know, without aiming either for exposé or allegiance, was what the modern American witchcraft scene, honestly and candidly, is all about.

To learn about this sub-rosa world, I needed to meet other initiated witches, not dilettantes. So I considered the next avenue open to me, and this is the one I took:

I decided to introduce myself as a professional writer working on a book about modern American witchcraft, and set out to talk with witches on their own home ground in face-to-face encounters with no posture or camouflage on my part.

What *is* witchcraft all about in America today? I was to ask that question over and over again.

This does not mean that, willy-nilly, I accepted everything I was told and have reported it here without any attempt to separate trash from truth. There is no simple yardstick by which a witch is measured. They come in all sizes, shapes and colors, and you'll never recognize a witch by the crone and cackle image of folklore. In the beginning,

I followed many false leads in my personal witch-hunt. In addition to being passed along from witch to witch, I also placed advertisements in certain selected publications. I did this on Joe's advice. He, too, was as curious as I to measure and evaluate such a response.

One such ad, placed in the *Village Voice*, read:

WANTED: WITCHES
To help a researching writer

A box number was given for replies.

That one-time ad netted some thirty responses. Interestingly enough, none of them were invitations to a personal orgy. I had expected that. Two of them were slightly suggestive and anonymous.

Five of them were from teen-age girls, none over sixteen. When I checked them out, I discovered that four had briefly been involved with men who called themselves "warlocks." From the stories these girls told me, the correct word for the men would be "pimp." When these kids answered my ad, they did so warily. One, for instance, said that if I would call a certain number, I could talk with a girl who thought she was a witch. The note was signed, "A Friend." The girl herself, of course, sent the letter. She, too, had had the "warlock" experience.

The fifth girl lives in Connecticut. She had been briefly involved with an older group of boys in the East Village where she hung out over weekends. She told me that they were supposed to form a coven, and that is what attracted her originally. She said that, beyond some loose talk, the meetings swiftly turned into LSD parties and she dropped out because she wasn't interested in that. She insisted that the witchcraft angle was merely a gimmicky come-on for a drug scene.

The vast majority of those who answered the ad were men and women sincerely seeking information about witchcraft and turning to me in the hope that I could help them find an established coven. In a few instances, I was able to do this.

The remaining few were individuals who believed that

their occasional spontaneous ESP experiences meant a natural claim to witchdom. Their stories were interesting, but useless as far as this book is concerned.

Joe helped me screen the responses. It was his verdict that only one authentic witch turned up from the ad. I am calling him Robert. He agreed that advertising was an interesting way to flush out information—but not from witches. They were simply not prone to answer ads, he said.

"Why, then," I asked at once, "did you answer this one?"

He shrugged. "Your vibrations were right," he said.

"Through a newspaper?" I was incredulous.

"Through a newspaper," he answered firmly.

Later on, I was to receive a letter from Dr. Herbert Sloane, head of a Satanic cult in Toledo, inviting me to a coven meeting. When I called to accept, I couldn't resist asking why he extended such an invitation to rites which were customarily held in secret.

"I like your vibrations," he responded.

That evening, I told Joe about the conversation.

"Seems this girl has an identity problem," I reported. "Good or bad—witch or Devil worshiper—my vibrations are right!"

He laughed.

"Just say you have good vibrations—with Satanic overtones," he teased.

All the material I have used here was either given to me by initiated witches or confirmed by them as an accurate interpretation of their beliefs. Many of those upon whom I have relied work outside the coven structure. Each of them, however, is known to a coven and their contributions accepted by me as reliable.

Within the coven itself, there is only one spokesman, usually the priest or priestess, but there is no inviolate rule on this point. Occasionally, the spokesman role is delegated to a coven member.

Most of the time, I would meet and talk with all members of a coven. By mutual agreement, only the spokes-

man of that coven has been quoted here, even when they requested anonymity. There was never any particular formality to our meetings. We never did meet as a committee or as a group around a conference table. Such meetings were actually bull sessions. My talks with witches have taken place in living rooms, kitchens, hotel rooms, bars, patios and by the side of swimming pools. Even at a discotheque.

I was spending the weekend as the guest in the home of Bill Janney, spokesman for a Cincinnati coven.* During the day, other members of the group dropped in and out, some just to say "Hello," some to stay and chat for several hours. By the time dinner was finished, witchcraft was a talked-out subject. Far from being bored, temporarily at least, I had reached a saturation point.

So, we descended on a discotheque. There were nine of us and I was the only nonwitch in the party. Despite the fact that it was 11 o'clock on a Saturday night and the basement room was packed solid, we found two adjoining tables that were placed side by side to accommodate our party.

To me, the din of a discotheque is unspeakable. Certainly conversation of any sort is nearly impossible. Yet, it was under such circumstances that I fully understood for the first time what witches mean when they mention the unanimity that they hold among themselves. Within a very few minutes, even I, a nonwitch, had the distinct sensation that we were in an isolation booth. Dissonance faded to background noise. Witches had brought their own form of silence with them.

Compiling the views of modern American witches is

*After this book went to press, Bill (his full name was James William and people who did not know him personally automatically called him Jim) was killed in an accident. Aside from personal grief at the loss of a friend, I was saddened that he did not live to see this book in print.

The week before he died, we had an hour-long, joyful, long-distance talk. At that time, he was enormously set up by the birth of another daughter, Elizabeth. My own personal news that this book was in production delighted him almost as much. As far as I am concerned, Bill is very much alive here. Phyllis, his widow, agrees that this is the way he would want it to be.

like charting an unknown course on an uncertain sea. While they hold to the same basic religious beliefs, there is no national clearing house of information, no National Council of Churches, no Vatican. Not even a regional structure exists. Witches maintain no organization, except within their own covens; therefore they have no organizational top structure. No final authority is recognized who can give a stamp of approval to their utterances. As a widely scattered and diversified group, they have never issued a "policy statement" and are never likely to do so. For this book, my primary goal was to gather as much information as possible from a hitherto silent segment of our society and to present it with as much conformity on their part as I could manage.

We are a society of samplers and poll takers. But witches defy categorizing. Even if a questionnaire could be designed to measure them sociologically, how would you distribute it? Witches don't know how many of them there are—much less where they are. There is no census, no master mailing list. Anyone who claims to have such a list is either lying or deluded.

Joseph Wilson of Topeka, Kansas, who publishes a quarterly newsletter, *The Waxing Moon*, has probably done more than any other American witch to devise such a list. He is quick to point out that even he is never in touch with the full membership of any coven other than his own, only the spokesman. Of course, he has struck up personal friendships with other witches outside his own coven, but they don't swap membership lists with each other.

Yet, from the very beginning, it seemed obvious to me that witches must share one particular quality at least—they are nonconformists.

But this is true of many other Americans today. Why, then, aren't all nonconformists, many of whom are also highly intuitive and sensitive if not psychic, attracted to witchcraft? Pagan, Druid or witch—no matter the term—it seemed to me that many more highly individualistic men and women should have embraced the craft, despite the fact it still operates underground.

I do not doubt that interest is growing by leaps and bounds, just as the witches maintain. But what governs such

growth? Are other dimensions necessary to the character of a witch?

Personally, I believe so. I am also convinced that they can never be measured with any degree of accuracy. For example, there is one trait which I observed in every single one of the witches I have grown to know: As mature men and women, they have never lost that simple faith most of us believe to be the special province of children. It is one of their most charming qualities.

I had noticed this time and again in small ways. The concept hit me full-blown one evening when a Chicago witch (his name is Tom and you'll hear more of him later) spoke so trustingly to me of a highly personal problem, certain that I would not use it as an illustration to underscore his witchcraft convictions, although he had already given me carte blanche to quote him.

I deliberately pursued this particular point with him. As a reporter, I was determined to nettle him into admitting to an indiscretion.

"You're as innocent as a child," I finally said with some exasperation.

"Haven't you ever known a child who was more astute than you when it comes to instinct?" he countered. "Kids *are* bright. When they are very young, they are in tune with the Universe. It takes time for adults to warp and distort their natural faith."

Witches make much of this point. They are always quick to point out that much is written about children and how to rear them properly. They often say that conscientious American parents take such advice too seriously, too literally and too indiscriminately.

As parents, witches seem to believe it is just as important to listen to their children as to the child-rearing expert. They are always curious to know what their children are thinking and feeling about the world which surrounds them.

They invariably refer to witchcraft as the "Craft of the Wise," while at the same time retaining their own childlike candor. Is this part of the wisdom of which they speak?

I have developed my own rather nebulous theory which suggests—to me at least—that they possess a "collective

personality." How many common character denominators do they possess as a group? Obviously witchcraft is *not* just an attention-getting device. To that hard-core, main-line witch, passion for secrecy has, in the past, been a major characteristic. It is their security blanket.

Charles is a New England witch and a graduate from an accredited American medical school. He urged me to try to classify witch traits.

"They won't be sociologically valid," I objected.

"Why not?" he challenged. Then he delivered his remark on "sociological sewerage." I still protested. "After all, I have no charts, no graphs, no percentages and no control groups. All of these are essential to any sociological study. And, in a way, that is what I would be attempting."

"You have people," he reminded me.

"True. About two hundred."

"At least," he agreed. He knew all about that unwritten law of the spokesman convention of covens. He should. He was one of them.

"The literature is loaded with so-called studies of witchcraft," he pointed out. "There is almost nothing about the witches themselves. Well, now, I agree with you that there is no way to say how many of us fall within certain age groups or how many of us are alcoholics or teetotalers or blue-collar workers or professionals, Democrats, Republicans, Liberals, conservatives, married, widowed, divorced, orphaned. I don't even know how you could go about finding out how many of us are men or women. Some day this may be possible. Not yet."

He was right. I can only guess at such facts. It was one of the reasons I was dubious about generalizations and I said as much.

"Nonsense," he countered. "What do you know about ornithophobia?"

"Nothing."

"Are you willing to believe that an article on this subject was published in a highly respected scientific journal and that conclusions—behavioral conclusions—were drawn

based on a study of *four* women? A very small sampling, wouldn't you say?"

I agreed. "But what is ornithophobia?"

"Having a 'thing' about birds," he said.

Charles rang for his secretary and asked for a file of the *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*. When she brought it, he flipped through the pages until he found the article he was looking for and then he commented, "The only thing these women had in common was they all drank too much and dreamed about birds from time to time."

Then he read this aloud:

" 'The bird as a phallic symbol is well known and the fear of fluttering wings in flight has been described as a derivative of the fear of the penis and sexuality. However, ornithophobia as a manifestation of penis envy has not previously been related to alcoholism.' "

Birds? Alcoholism? Penis envy? There is a connection among the three?

"This has nothing directly to do with witches, of course," Charles said as he slammed the file shut. "But I do make this point: If a recognized authority can publish a scientific paper in a reputable journal, observing the peculiarity of human behavior on the basis of what he has observed about four women, by all means feel free to do the same with the sampling of two hundred witches which you claim. I suspect it's more than that, anyway."

Joe Lukach agreed with Charles.

"You know that libraries are full of books on witchcraft," he said. "Most of them are about the witchcraft trials of the Middle Ages, really. I can sum up witchcraft in one sentence—it's a religion which was smashed by Christianity and is now rising again."

But witches as people?

"We've never held a national conference, more's the pity," he added. "Cross country, we don't know each other personally as well as we should. I've told you everything I know about certain things we all have in common as far as our religious beliefs are concerned. So have others. You fit them together. *You* tell *us* about the other things you have learned."

Witches say the principal clue to their identity is the sensitivity that they call "vibrations," which allows one to recognize another. I cannot recognize a witch by that method. In addition, they identify themselves as being scrupulously neat and clean. They say they react strongly to color, dress according to their own highly personal taste and style and are usually hatless and otherwise unhampered by binding clothing. I found those observations to be accurate. A minor, but revealing note: A barefoot witch is a happy witch. At home, they are forever kicking off their shoes.

In delving more deeply into their "collective personality," I found these other common traits along with individualism, innocence and candor:

• *Witches are not religious rebels.* Aside from hereditary ones, others come from Protestant, Catholic and Jewish backgrounds. I would not even venture a guess as to whether or not a percentage breakdown would show that one predominates over another; I suspect it comes in that order, though. It would be possible to get such information from individual witches or coven spokesmen. This would be a relatively small sampling, although I doubt whether most spokesmen would have such data about their membership simply because they don't care enough to ask. Witches don't particularly care what you've been, but what you *are*. They would consider such information totally useless, and me an idiot for asking.

None of them have ever expressed themselves as "rejecting" their early religious upbringing. None has spoken of going through periods of agnosticism or atheism in order to find a "true" religion. The word they most commonly use to express their innermost feelings about religion before they found the Craft is—"search."

Belief in reincarnation is implicit in witchcraft, a fact that is not particularly astonishing, since three-quarters of the people in the world today, of many religious persuasions, believe in the progression of an individual soul through a series of lifetimes on earth before it develops perfection and moves to a higher plane of existence. With each rebirth on earth, it is thought that the soul—or en-

tity—deliberately chooses its parents in order to gain the life experience necessary for advancement.

The theory of reincarnation has not been scientifically proved, of course, but it was a belief of many early Christians. It is interesting to note that it was not until the Council of Constantinople in 553 A.D. that the Church saw fit to declare reincarnation heresy and Christian teaching of this doctrine was abandoned.

• *Witches are not psychiatrically oriented.* It seems to me to be entirely unreasonable to assume that they have never been exposed to Freudian theories or other psychiatric schools of thought, at least within their own families of origin. But all such theories that attempt to explain human behavior seem to have slipped through their minds and emotions as if they had been greased for the trip.

True, Charles often impressed me as being overly concerned with the psychiatric discipline. His attitude was unique. Assuredly, he was not only better informed than most witches, he was constantly exposed, either directly or indirectly, because he himself is a practicing physician. But, in all fairness to him, I must observe that his fellow witches are as loath to believe that psychiatry has influenced their lives as an analyst is disinclined to admit that magic has cured a mentally ill patient. Witches do not reject psychiatric theory. To the vast majority of them it may as well be nonexistent. Witches simply accept the human condition, relax and enjoy it as best they can. They spend no time at all attempting to rationalize it.

Nor do they reject the medical profession any more than they reject other religions. They expect obstetricians to deliver their children and orthopedic surgeons to set their broken bones. They will probably try to cure their own warts, however.

• *Formal education bores them.* Witches, as a group, are the most dedicated students I have ever encountered, yet few of them hold college degrees or show any interest in earning one. I haven't the slightest idea what their average educational level is. With those I have met, the range is from graduate degrees to high school diplomas. I did not meet any below that educational level. I have only met three with doctorates. To those who are practicing in

the professions, their degrees were important to them for that reason and that reason only. Except for them, and they are in the minority, most witches seemed content with the ability to read and write. They do not seem to hold to the American belief that education can be acquired in a classroom. Higher education is, to them, merely another form of big business and part of the American establishment. Again, they are not to be found among the dropouts or protestors. They simply ignore that route.

They look upon education as a life-long, on-going process and believe that true knowledge can only be gained through constant study and that, along with study, must go long periods of meditation.

They are omnivorous readers. I have never been in a witch's home where books and periodicals were not as much a part of the household equipment as pots and pans. In a way, they have taught themselves to be students. Yet, their knowledge is not necessarily lopsided. Their natural curiosity will lead them to read and study on a variety of subjects totally unrelated to witchcraft or the occult.

• *All witches profess to practice some form of magic.* I quickly learned it is almost impossible to separate a witch from his magic. They see it at work everywhere and their belief in its power is unshakable. In general—and this is admittedly an oversimplification—there are two kinds of magic.

The first, *magia,* is known as high, ritual or ceremonial magic. The practitioner is called a Magus or Mage. The standard explanation offered by witches is that ceremonial magic developed as an art in the Near East. Persia, Egypt and India are the three most commonly named countries of origin. Another system of *magia,* Cabala (Kabala and Qabbala are other spellings), arose from early Hebrew tradition. At some unknown point during the Middle Ages, these systems began to blend. The Faustus legend by Marlowe and Goethe is in this *magia* tradition. Because some American witches do study ceremonial magic, I'll cover that aspect later.

The second, *goetia,* or low magic, is closer to that which witches actually practice. Sometimes called "folk" magic and associated with old wives' tales and superstí-

tions, it has been traced back to prehistoric times. It does not require the long years of book study and scholarly accomplishment the mastering of *magia* demands.

Low magic—the word does not mean base—is directed toward the achievement of goals a ceremonial magician would consider mundane. He means to exalt himself and will evoke demons to get results. Low magic means to satisfy the common desires which have absorbed most of us since man lived in a cave. Witches direct their magic toward easing the problems of everyday life and they apply their magic to the people who come to them for help in healing, in business or in love.

A variety of techniques are used in the performance of witch magic. There is candle magic, herbal magic, gem magic and sympathetic magic, often called image magic. The latter employs the use of actual photographs, articles of clothing, handwriting specimens, fingernail parings, hair strands or drops of blood of the person the magic is meant to influence. In sympathetic magic, lacking any of these props, dolls can be fashioned of clay or wax and used as a symbol.

Then there is mental magic. In this form, the magic is achieved through prayer and meditation and a clear, relentless mental image of the goal to be achieved.

Magic is also enacted through the preparation of charms and talismans. More unusual, and highly specialized, is the magic which is accomplished by the spirits the witch can summon while in a trance state.

Some witches specialize in only one technique. Some use a combination, depending upon versatility. And, of course, some are proficient in the use of all techniques.

But magic by no means makes up the totality of witchcraft. Witchcraft, its followers emphasize, is a religion. They say one lives as a witch in the same sense that one lives as a Christian, Jew, Hindu, Moslem or Buddhist.

2. . . . a Hex is a Hex is a Hex

When it comes to witchcraft, the religion, rituals vary from coven to coven, according to the traditions inherited from their country of origin, and each coven is autonomous. This principle is indigenous to the whole American witchcraft system, as we shall see later on. It is not unusual for the spokesman from one coven to call another to seek advice and consultation. But this is the only major overlap in their functions.

Yet, despite their diversity, all witches hold three basic religious beliefs in common: They believe in a female and a male deity; they believe in communication with a Godhead; they believe that each witch possesses the ability to develop his individual psychic talents.

It is this third belief that always has captured the imagination and caused confusion whenever the word "witch" is mentioned. It still does. Here is where the magic lurks. In witchcraft, the practice of magic is an *extension* of these occult talents.

As for those talents themselves—crystal-ball gazing and other forms of scrying, astrology, Tarot cards, numerology, palmistry, graphology, psychometry—all witches strive to develop psychic skill in any one or more of these according to their own natural inclination. None are essential to the practice of witchcraft. What *is* essential is a sensitivity to the occult, and these studies are meant to sharpen their awareness. After all, many people who are highly developed in these occult studies never become witches because they are not drawn to the aspect of religious worship.

By the same token, many people who practice magic are not witches, either, although all witches study magic

and practice some form of it, from the simplest protective spells to the highest ceremonial acts that may require weeks to set up and months to execute.

What is this thing called "magic"?

"It is that which it is, drawing from itself only, even as mathematics do, for it is the exact and absolute science of Nature and her laws."

This is an opening explanation offered by Éliphas Lévi in his *History of Magic*, a work recommended by many witches as a comprehensive, if controversial, study of the subject. Lévi, who was born in Paris in 1810 as Alphonse Louis Constant, spent his young years as a seminarian but left the Church to eventually become an exponent of occult science.

Arthur E. Waite, author of *Ceremonial Magic*, translated Lévi's work. He noted in his introduction that "Magic is still the science of Nature and her laws because it is the science of equilibrium."

And, in the words of a twentieth-century American witch, Edward Fitch of Washington, D.C., an electronics engineer by profession, "Magic is the science of getting results by means not immediately apparent or logical."

Ed is about thirty, single and, on the surface, an average WASP-type American male. His hair is dark chestnut, closely cropped, thick and slightly wavy. His eyes are an even darker brown, sparkling behind horn-rimmed glasses. There is nothing average about his bubbly confidence, however.

I first met Ed at a cocktail party. That meeting was no coincidence. We had written to each other, spoken over the telephone, but our paths were always criss-crossing. Ed, who works for a large corporation, travels a lot. As a writer, so do I. We had been out of touch for several weeks when a mutual witch friend, knowing both our schedules, discovered we were both going to be in the same large Midwestern city on the same night. I was slated to attend a cocktail party, a business affair I could not gracefully avoid. Ed had planned to drive in, arriving about 7 P.M., just when the party would be in full swing. However, I had to catch a midnight plane back to New York. Our mutual witch friend solved the problem. Through a third party, he arranged for Ed to be invited to the party, too.

I learned that night that witchcraft is a swinging conversational gambit in almost any gathering. No one else there suspected that a real witch was in their midst. We were introduced in the haphazard fashion one expects. After that, Ed wandered around, making small social chitchat with all the other guests, passing easily from one cluster to another. I watched him as closely and discreetly as I could. This was my first chance to see a witch mingle with complete strangers.

I was somewhat taken aback, however, when Ed casually joined one small group I was chatting with and asked me a few questions of his own about witchcraft.

I couldn't resist. Looking him straight in the eye, I remarked that one of the first things I found out was that you simply couldn't recognize a witch when you met one face to face. He nodded very earnestly at that comment, then turned to share his apparently spontaneous reaction with the elderly man who stood next to him. "Why," he said seriously, "that is absolutely fascinating!"

That group splintered after a few more conversational exchanges and then, when the time had come for me to leave and I was thanking my hostess, there was Ed by my side.

"Don't call a cab," he said easily to her. "I'll drop Miss Roberts at the airport." He turned to look down at me. "Will that be all right with you?" he asked politely.

"But of course. I'd be delighted. If you're sure it's not out of your way."

"Is done, then," and with that, we said good-bye and we left.

I had been particularly anxious to talk to Ed because he is an electronics engineer, and I wanted to ask him to explain his views on magic. We didn't have much time together then, of course. So we plunged right into the subject.

"Ask away," he said, as soon as we were settled for the drive.

"Does magic work?" I asked bluntly.

"Certainly," he answered promptly. "I look at it this way, naturally enough. Setting up a magic ritual is no

different from setting up a transistor radio. Magic is a science like physics, chemistry—or electronics engineering. You start out with a few basic assumptions and many logical theorems. In chemistry and physics, the scientist does controlled experiments in his laboratory and produces identical results. In magic, the witch sets up an altar with the proper equipment—and with proper training—gets consistent results. The principles are the same. But some of the ingredients differ. We add supernatural forces.

"Now, like any other technical field, the actual operation of magic is extremely complex, and expecting a neophyte to become an unqualified success in it is like expecting a high school algebra student to be an expert in stellar structure," he went on. "You simply cannot apply DC theory to AC circuits and have them work. By the same token, you must be certain that you do not make the same mistake in magic. As long as magic is used correctly, it will work consistently."

"Can you prove magic works?" I asked.

"You tell me what *proof* is!" Ed shot back. "To me, in any discipline, proof is the point at which you refuse to accept further evidence."

A copout? That's Ed's answer. Take it or leave it.

A Baltimore witch who is an ex-Jesuit merely shrugged when I asked him the same question. He agreed with Ed and then went on to point out that most people tend to forget that the Catholic Mass is a magical ritual.

"At the very heart of the Mass is the secret of transubstantiation," he said. According to the Catholic Church, this is the changing of the substance of the bread and wine of the Eucharist into the substance of the body and blood of Christ with only the appearance of the bread and wine remaining.

"In magic and miracles I still believe," he added. "After all, the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, is full of both. Theologians, unfortunately, took over Christanity long ago and now dogma strangles the Church like water lilies clog a pond. Magic, yes. Dogma, no."

To him, as to other witches, belief in magic is a matter of faith. They are perfectly aware that they cannot prove magic for the simple reason that its essential nature defies the human senses as we now understand them.

They are quick to insist that magic cannot be disproved, either. "Why seek to deny what you cannot understand?" is a theme which Éliphas Lévi repeatedly posed and one which witches frequently quote.

I don't know any witches, however, who claim that their magic works all the time.

Joseph Wilson, spokesman for a Topeka, Kansas, coven puts it this way: "We do practice magic, but it does not manifest itself in the same way Samantha's [on the popular television series *Bewitched*] does. It's different, but it works about 80 percent of the time, maybe a little better, depending on the skill of the person who uses it."

Joe Lukach, while claiming an average of 85 percent, freely admits that some of his efforts go astray. He cheerfully calls them his "Aunt Claras" [again, after a character on the *Bewitched* program].

Assuming a belief in magic, I certainly received the dubious benefit of one of Joe's Aunt Claras.

On a hot, gluey day last July, I had planned a patio party. When I got up that morning to begin preparations, I discovered to my disgust that there was no hot water in the apartment.

This was clearly a job for the building superintendent, and as soon as I complained (as had other tenants), he assured me, "Everything was being done."

Nevertheless, by early afternoon, there was still no hot water, so, just before I left to do some last-minute grocery shopping, I called Joe and complained to him. He was one of my expected guests.

He told me to go right ahead shopping and, "Don't worry about a thing. I'll work on it." By that, he meant magically, not mechanically.

When I returned home a couple of hours later, and hopefully turned on the taps, hot water gushed. Unfortunately, heat was also pouring into the room from the radiator. Even the heat in the lobby of the building was

on. The super was in the cellar. I don't know whether he was still working on the boiler or hiding from the tenants.

By the time my guests began to arrive, the air conditioning was laboring against the radiator, which clanged wildly to gain supremacy over the temperature.

"You made an overkill, witch," I greeted Joe somewhat sourly when he rang the bell.

He was not in the least abashed. "One of my Aunt Claras!" he exclaimed, and after saying "Hello" to everyone, he went out to the patio, asking to be left alone for a few minutes.

I don't know whether it was the super in the cellar or the witch on the patio, but shortly after that, the heat hissed and expired and the party proceeded in comfort. The hot water stayed on.

Is magic good or bad? White or black? Here we begin to delve into that basic question which is of vital concern to witches. It is also important to understand, they insist, that almost every one of us is involved in some form of magic whether we realize it or not. Like it or not. Believe it or not.

For instance, I was told black magic can be as simple as this:

Are you a sucker for a chain letter?

Then listen to Joe's warning:

"When you get a chain letter through the mail, return it to the person who sent it *at once*. It's the only way to break the spell of black magic which was put into the *original* letter."

Joe was deadly serious. He was also taking his own advice quite literally because, at the time, he was sitting at his dining room table scribbling a chastising note to enclose with a chain letter he was returning.

"These letters," he muttered as he wrote. Then he looked up and said:

"People should know that if they pass them on—innocently enough—they're involved in black magic. The letter may read like a prayer—actually, most of them do—

but if you read it very, very carefully, you can see the subtle threat it carries. That is the curse. It's wicked. Subtle, but wicked," he added tartly.

When he finished the note, he disappeared into the kitchen to broil a steak for dinner and left the chain letter with me to read.

I was sitting at the dining room table, too, and we were no more than eight feet apart, separated only by strings of carmine-colored wooden beads which hang between the two rooms.

We could see and hear each other quite clearly as I read the letter aloud:

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and all will acknowledge Him and He will light your way," it said.

"This prayer has been sent to you for good luck. The original copy came from the Netherlands. It has been around the world nine times. The luck has been sent to you. You are to receive good luck within four days after receiving this copy. This is no joke. You will receive it in the mail. Send 20 copies of this letter to friends. Friends you think need good luck. Please do not send money. Do not keep this letter. It must leave within 96 hours after you receive it.

"A U.S. officer received $7,000. Don Elliot received $60,000 but lost it when he broke the chain. While in the Philippines, General Wopah lost his life six days after receiving the copy. He failed to circulate this prayer. However, before his death, he received $775,000 he had won. Please send 20 copies and see what happens to you on the fourth day."

When I finished reading the letter, there was a moment of utter silence, then a moment of pandemonium, and Joe came racing out of the kitchen, laughing.

"Four days be damned," he said. "Just as you finished reading, the stove short-circuited—and so did the curse. The lights flashed and died—our steak caught fire."

"That could happen any time, Joe," I said, objecting mildly to his immediate conclusion. I was not yet accustomed to the fact that witches see magic at work around them constantly.

"Sure," he conceded. "But where did the big puddle of

water in the middle of the kitchen floor come from?"

With that, he went to the closet for a mop and I went into the kitchen for a close-up look.

I don't know where the water came from. But it was indeed there, like a small isolated pond away from walls and windows and any suspicion of a leak from the floor or ceiling. Joe just shrugged and mopped it up.

"Things," he said matter-of-factly, "happen in magic."

Because Joe refused to let me keep the actual letter for my files, I recorded it on his tape recorder. Two days later, when I was ready to transcribe it, I discovered that he had erased it.

I was frankly put out. Personally, I have never received a chain letter and saw no chance of retrieving the one which was lost.

Joe was calm.

"You'll get it back," he assured me.

This was my first head-on run-in with a basic witch attitude: "Nothing is ever lost." I found it absolutely maddening.

The next day, I was down in Greenwich Village setting up some interviews with witches who live there. As I walked down Christopher Street, I passed The Clothes Line, a shop run by Tony Altieri, the designer who makes my clothes.

Knowing full well it was August, the shop closed for the month and Tony on vacation, nevertheless I beat on his door. Much to my surprise, Tony answered. He had gotten back early.

"How's the book, Susie?" he asked when we were settled to coffee and cigarettes.

"Oh, the novel? Well, you see, I put it aside. I'm doing one on witchcraft instead."

He whooped.

"Susie! You're a crazy one. There's no such thing."

"Did you ever get a chain letter, Tony?" I asked. I was still feeling quite miffed about the loss of the other one.

"Them? Oh sure. Got one this morning."

Tony got up, rummaged around on his desk and brought

me a chain letter—identical to the one that had been erased from the tape.

It is the letter which appears here.

Score one for the witch attitude.

If, on the other hand, I was told, you spill salt and, feeling foolish, throw some over your left shoulder "for luck," then you are actively engaging in the practice of white magic.

Salt, as a natural mineral of the earth, is extensively used in magic. The act of "throwing over the shoulder," even if it is only a thought in the mind, serves to break the curse of bad luck invoked in the accidental spilling, and is known to witchcraft as one of the simplest "protective" spells which anyone may use.

Today, we call this superstition and let it go at that. Since superstition weaves itself in and out of all low magic, what does it mean to a witch?

The Lévi definition is one of the best I encountered. He states that "Superstitions are religious forms surviving the loss of ideas. Some truth no longer known or a truth which has changed its aspect is the origin and explanation of all. Their name, from the Latin *superstes*, signifies that which survives. They are the dead remnants of old knowledge or opinions."

In the practice of magic, witches say they have learned how to exert controls over the forces of good (positive) and the forces of evil (negative) in order to accomplish a specific purpose.

Purpose. That is the key word. In it lies the difference between white magic and black magic. Witches and Satanists.

To me, it seems to be a simple case of who is doing what and to whom. And why.

Joe boils it down to this:

"The difference between white magic and black magic is the *intent* of the act. In that sense, there is only *one* form of magic. Witches believe that all good things must be done in a good manner. One can't do evil in a good cause."

Like most witches, before he warms to the subject of black magic, he assumes a subtle sanctimonious posture. A whiff of piety scents the air, then dissipates.

"Witches make a distinction," Joe said. "Black magic is a deliberate act which would harm anyone who didn't deserve it. It is usually performed for an ulterior purpose. Often against a perfect stranger. Usually for money."

"Who, exactly, are these black magicians, if they aren't witches?" I asked.

"Well, first of all, they aren't all Satanists. Witches can't stand Satanists simply because we loathe being identified as black magicians. Yet it's stupid to assume that all people march under banners. I don't suppose for one minute that everyone who tags himself a Satanist is actually adept at the practice of black magic. I figure a lot of them are simply anti-Christers. On the other hand, your really devastating black artist is never in this world going to announce himself as such, unless he's flipped. And they are everywhere."

"Where?"

"Business, industry. Look, it works like this: Anyone can find books about black magic. And they can play around with it all they want to in the privacy of their own homes. Some are taught by another adept. Some get to be pretty good. Some get burned and quit. But get back to that word *intent*. Black magicians, with no consideration of the moral values involved, use their knowledge for their own benefit, sometimes to get ahead in the world.

"I'm not calling names. But I can tell you for a fact that a lot of people in this world haven't gotten that raise they deserved, or that promotion they were in line for, simply because the guy right behind him used a little black magic to leapfrog him."

"Isn't that just sort of speculation, Joe? Come on now. I know you dislike black magicians and all they stand for, but do you know anyone who's done such a thing?"

"Not directly, no. But people come to me who say they have reason to believe a black magician is working against them. This is how I help them: I don't brew a return curse. It's not nice. So, what I do is this: I work a

protective spell over my friend. And that takes care of any dirty work that might have been done."

"How? What happens?"

"Depends. It seems to be one of the rules and regulations of magic that, somehow or other, you do find out what happens. The black magic aborts. And it can happen in many ways. The black magician will get sick. Or break a leg. Anything. I haven't asked for judgment. That's not for me to decide. Certainly, I don't mutter, 'Drop dead.' But the protective spell will, if it's properly cast, most certainly checkmate the hex. And knock the person responsible for it off-balance."

Black *or* white, there is another facet to the practice of magic to be considered.

Is the psychological attitude of the individual who thinks he has been cursed by a black magician so strong that, subconsciously, he *makes* the magic work? Joe had been asked this so often, he answered with no hesitation at all.

"Psychological implication is a complete fallacy," he said flatly. "People like to think *they* have to believe in magic in order to be affected by it—but this just is not true.

"The witch who performs magic knows how to utilize and command the elements of fire, earth, air and water. And, what is more essential, something which we call the life force. Now all of these surround each and every one of us every day and every night. It is through these elements, and the life force, that magicians can make whatever they desire happen *to* you—and *for* you. Or, in the case of the black magician, *against* you. Belief in the power of magic is not in the least necessary."

"What about your knowledge? What I mean is, do you have to know magic is being used for or against you?"

"Nope," he said. "The results are just the same."

He grew more thoughtful.

"Most people fear the forces in the Universe which they cannot control. It follows that they would like to believe they must know they have been hexed for a curse to work. Life is more comfortable that way."

For a moment Joe was very, very quiet and withdrawn, and when he spoke again, his voice was somber.

"Believe me," he repeated slowly, "you don't have to know—or believe."

Then he smiled broadly and, in a lighter vein, added:

"A hex is a hex is a hex. . . ."

Is it?

The Tin Whistle is a 90-minute television drama written by Richard Burdick which was produced and directed by Bill Francisco in 1964 for Channel 13 in Pittsburgh.

Bill, who, with a partner, heads Cinemage Limited in New York, is an independent film producer. He has also put together high-powdered nightclub acts for the Las Vegas–New York–Miami Beach circuit for such long-time headliners as Kathryn Grayson and Howard Keel.

The Tin Whistle is about witchcraft and the plot is concerned with the relationship between a ten-year-old boy, who is involved with black magic, and his father, a minister.

"Three years ago, I knew nothing about witchcraft, really," Bill said. "I was working with the dynamics of black magic and evil from pure dramatic instinct. I only knew that, as far as I was concerned, that play was one of the best things I had ever done. My interest began with one criterion—is it good theater?"

Before he completed the job he was certain the entire production had been hexed.

The play was one of seven original productions sponsored by the Alcoa Corporation for Educational Television. Bill had produced two of them and *The Tin Whistle* was the fifth to be commissioned.

"We had a ten-day shooting schedule on this one. We planned to do the interior shots in the studio on videotape, the location shots about two and a half miles outside Pittsburgh on film.

"The morning we were to begin shooting, we arrived on location complete with camera crews and cast, only to find a brand-new house going up in the background. What could we do? Lose a day? Move a crew? Where in hell had that house sprung from? We shot around it, cursing," he said.

That was the beginning.

Bill, a hazel-eyed, lanky six-footer with sandy hair going gray, was warming to the subject.

"Forget the freaky little things like running out of film in the middle of a take. Forget the actors who just got lost on their way to location," he said.

Having dismissed these difficulties as minor casualties, he settled down to ticking off other disasters on the fingers of his right hand.

"One. The first eight hundred feet of film came back damaged. We managed to salvage it without reshooting.

"Two. We moved from outside to inside the studio, switching from film to videotape. The tape came back defective—grainy—not up to network quality. Again, we were able to make corrections in the lab.

"Three. The sound track was lost.

"Four. At this point of hysteria, I learned we were to go on the air in two weeks. No one had remembered to tell me. The official memo was lost in the mail. I was about to go out of my gourd.

"Five. Music! We had a great score. No percussion. Harps, guitars, and an electric organ hauled into the studio for the recording. Except it arrived out of tune with the other instruments and couldn't be adjusted."

Bill had run out of fingers on his right hand.

"Oh, well," he said, abandoning specific enumeration of his disasters, "that should give you a rough idea."

The big blow came when the show timed out three minutes too long.

"Then we spent two round-the-clock sessions cutting, synchronizing, editing—all the things you go through to fit the button to the hole," he said.

That perfect print was lost. Frantic tracers failed to turn it up before air time. They went on with the slightly sloppy version.

The big blow was promptly followed by the shattering one.

Bill sums it up in two words: devastating silence.

"We didn't get bad reviews. We didn't get any at all,"

he said with some awe. "We were totally ignored. It was almost as if we hadn't done the show at all. As if it didn't even exist. Not only was the show ignored by the critics who had reviewed all the other productions in the series, but the people in the studio walked past me as if I didn't exist either. No one seemed mad—just oblivious. It was damned creepy, let me tell you."

The mail response broke the web of silence.

"Then we were slaughtered. And it felt great. At least I knew I was alive."

The strangest part of it all was that everyone who wrote letters to the studio and to the sponsor not only vilified the play but they particularly hated the ending. The ending was not a resolution. The question still remained. Is the ten-year-old son a black magician and the father a saint, or . . . ?

"Magic, magic, who's got the magic?" Bill laughed. Then he added thoughtfully, "Isn't it odd. All our letter writers were enraged by that ending. The ending," he repeated. Then he shrugged. "They despised it, all right—but they couldn't turn it off."

That show, he told me, of all the seven which were commissioned by Alcoa, was the only one not to be given an automatic rerun on Channel 13.

A break in the stony silence, except for vituperative mail, came a few months later when the Documentary Film Society in Pittsburgh asked for a showing of the film at one of their meetings.

Bill explained that the society is a group of fifty or more film buffs, mostly composed of psychiatrists and psychologists and university-based men and women.

"I was elated, of course. I explained to them that I would be happy to discuss any technical problems of production—God knows we had them—but not the content of the film itself. I was not about to resolve the ending."

The question was not resolved the night the film was shown to the society, although it provoked, Bill said, a two-hour discussion.

The only certainty about the final scene is that it established the irreversible alienation of the son from the father.

"After three years, I have finally formed my own opinion," Bill said.

Which is?

"The ending," he answered cryptically, "is only the beginning."

"And who hexed the production?" I asked.

"God knows," he answered. "Looking back—and I've done it a hundred times—no one fits the role. And that doesn't mean a damn thing. I've learned since I did that show that no black magician in his right mind is going to come tap you on the shoulder and say 'Lookit, sweetie, I've flung a whammy your way.' That we were hexed, I haven't got the slightest doubt. But how?"

Bill was silent for a moment, translating his abstract thoughts into those visual images which are second nature to him. Then a big smile lit his face.

"We've got a baddie on the set. Bela Lugosi would've been perfect casting! Too bad we can't get him!"

Then he glanced at me slyly, lips quirked, ready to smile.

"How'd you feel about Shirley Temple in the role of the wicked witch? Think anyone would buy it?"

"Oh, Bill," I complained, realizing now he had been teasing me. "You *do* know what happened."

"Yep." Now he let the smile die. "I do. And it wasn't Shirley Temple. But it was a chick. A lot younger and just as lollipop sweet. You'd recognize her name if I told you even if she is an eternal second-stringer. And you'd never, never cast her as a bitchy witch."

"How did you find out?"

"Later. After the film was done. She wasn't in it. But she had auditioned. And got turned down. By me. Anyway, a few months later, I met Joe and after I found out he knew about such things, I told him the sad, sad saga of *The Tin Whistle*. He didn't pursue it. Just found it interesting. Then, a few months after that, when I was California putting together a TV commercial, the same chick auditioned again. This time I hired her. The rehearsals went badly. She balked at every direction. Hell, that's not unusual. Directors and actresses are always getting into ego hang-ups. But when she muttered something under her

breath about being a witch and showing me, my ears picked it up right away. I began to wonder.

"And I did something about it. No one knew it, but I'd been studying with Joe. I knew how to protect myself. At least I *hoped* I knew.

"The next morning when I got on the set, here comes my little actress friend, hobbling in with her foot in a cast. She'd sprained her ankle! I took one look and burst out laughing. I know I got pegged right then and there as a heartless bastard by the rest of the crew. But I simply couldn't help it. My very own first little protective spell worked! She must have aimed a goodie. Damn near broke her leg.

"Another thing. She was all sweetness and light. And contrition. Sure, she wanted the job and I did assure her that I could shoot from the waist up. No sweat. But for the rest of the week, until we finished the job, I would catch her looking at me and there were question marks in those big, blue eyes."

As far as *The Tin Whistle* is concerned, at some indefinable point along the way, there has been a psychic change of climate during the last three years. Bill says this has come about quite naturally. He assured me, when I asked, that Joe didn't make any move to unhex it. Joe says this is quite true. He didn't.

The film itself has always had its underground fans. The curiosity and controversy it originally aroused is still going on, according to Bill. The film was finally purchased by the National Educational Television network and shown nationally during 1969. The controversy has abated.

As for Bill, he now admits that the whole affair of *The Tin Whistle* has had a profound effect on his personal life.

"I'm a witch myself, now. I can tell you one thing for certain"—and with that, Bill echoed the words of Joe—"a hex is a hex is a hex."

Is it, really? People in show business are notoriously superstitious.

Yet the law firm in which President Nixon served as senior partner until his inauguration on January 20, 1969—Nixon, Mudge, Rose, Guthrie and Alexander—apparently agreed with the views of Bill and Joe when they filed a petition at 4:47 P.M. on June 7, 1968, before the National Labor Relations Board. They requested that the Board set aside the victory of the International Association of Machinists in an election held on May 31, 1968. The employer the Nixon firm represented was the General Cigar de Utaudo of Puerto Rico.

The attorney's charge? Witchcraft. Their client, they claimed, was hexed.

3. Nixon, Mudge, Rose, Guthrie and Alexander

Such a charge would seem to pluck the witchy feathers right off the warm carcass of superstitious showbiz and stick them onto the colder hands of business-labor negotiators. Who are also lawyers. And politicians.

But why? Why would they take such legal action? Are we willing and ready to believe *they* believe witch magic works?

I can't answer those questions, of course. I can only say that it seems entirely unlikely to me that this particular firm of attorneys was making a grandstand play for publicity by filing such an odd-ball suit. After all, this prestigious Wall Street firm has nearly a century of history behind it.

As reporter Don Oberdorfer, writing of that staid organization in the November 26, 1968, issue of the *New York Post* pointed out, "Until recently, hardly known beyond Wall Street, Nixon, Mudge now finds itself prominently mentioned in the press, and Nixon's principal partners are said to be unhappy about the publicity.

"The partners, cautious men without much experience in the glare of attention, feel themselves guided by a sense of propriety, a protective instinct toward their clients and their partnership, and by Canon 27 of the Ethics of the American Bar Association, which prohibits practicing attorneys from soliciting or inspiring publicity about themselves."

Among their clients, as listed by Oberdorfer, was the General Cigar Company, maker of Robert Burns White Owl and other cigars with annual sales of $220 million. The firm was reported to serve as general counsel. As such,

they would represent their client before federal regulatory agencies. This would include the Federal Labor Relations Board.

My witch friends—some have gleefully started calling themselves the "silent minority"—were entranced by this legal maneuver of the firm.

After all, witchcraft in America, or anywhere else for that matter, rarely hits the courts or even gets a legal hearing. I know of only two notable twentieth-century cases. Both of those involved malevolence and murder, hex and curses.

First was the 1929 trial of John Blymire of York County, Pennsylvania, a practitioner of witchcraft (it's called "pow-wow" in the Pennsylvania Dutch country) who was convicted of bludgeoning to death another witch, Nelson Rehmeyer. The trial, which the *Philadelphia Record* has called the "weirdest and most curiously fascinating in the history of modern jurisprudence," was covered in detail by Arthur H. Lewis in his 1969 book, *Hex*.

More recently, in Guadalupe, Arizona, "where witches still flourish as hardily as desert cactus," according to the May 11, 1953, issue of *Time* magazine, Joe S. Chavez stood trial for fatally shooting Maria Concepcion Estrella Miranda, an alleged witch.

Chavez, a rancher, was above such superstition as witchcraft, according to the *Time* account.

"Joe was big, tough and handsome," the story reads. "After he married beautiful Josefina Puebla back in 1929, she inherited a ranch near the Superstition Mountains. Joe raised white-faced cattle. Joe leased section after section of Government grazing land. Joe prospered. But ten years ago a dreadful thing happened to his wife. She began going blind, suffering from trancelike spells and complaining that her head was swelling up like a balloon."

After he had taken his wife to the best doctors and they found nothing wrong, she was admitted to a hospital in Phoenix. A month later she was almost totally blind. Desperate, he consulted a Puerto Rican witch who, for $100, prepared a secret potion for Josefina to drink. Her sight began to return.

"Then one day Maria Miranda—for it was Maria herself,

as it turned out, who had cursed Josefina—sneaked into Chavez's house, shrieked at Josefina 'You will never see again!' and fled," the article continues.

After that, according to trial evidence, Chavez sought help from other witches in Tucson, in Nogales, in Pitiquito, in Sonora and Cavorca, Mexico, but to no avail.

"Finally Joe went humbly to Maria herself. In her flyblown parlor, and with its green altar and its saints' pictures (some laid face down with coins placed against their lips to protect Maria's clients from gossip), Joe begged for a cure," the report says.

"Maria laughed. She would perhaps accept his $8,000 house, she said. But when he went back in two weeks she wanted his ranch, too. He refused. Maria tittered again. Why, she asked, didn't he get the law? He did not dare. Numbly, Joe went back to consulting other witches. All failed him.

"Finally one morning last fall, after four sleepless nights of watching over his wife, Joe got out his six-gun, strode into Maria's kitchen and 'shot her, one-two-three-four-five.' "

When he was brought to trial in November of 1953, he pleaded that he did not go back to Guadalupe to kill Maria but to get back a photograph of his wife. He said that he fired only after she refused him and reached for her shotgun.

The *Time* article concludes:

"The defense tried hard to make Joe's belief in Maria's power seem reasonable: 'We can't see God but we believe in him.' When Prosecutor William P. Mahoney, Jr., called all this 'compounding nonsense out of nonsense' and asked that Joe be sent to the gas chamber, Mexicans in the audience shivered. 'Wait,' whispered one, 'until *he* feels a curse!' In the end, the jury, rejecting both the defense's plea of temporary insanity and self-defense and the prosecution's demand for the death penalty, found Joe guilty of second-degree murder."

The Nixon, Mudge charges never received a hearing. The National Labor Relations Board denied their petition.

Whether or not the "hex" that Nixon, Mudge, Rose, Guthrie and Alexander complained about was black or white depends entirely upon whether the viewpoint taken is that of labor or management.

In the words of the AFL-CIO, "Add witchcraft to the reasons an employer can use to object to an election won by a union!"

As for the feelings of the employer, on their behalf, the Nixon firm followed through by filing ten objections. The second one was concerned with witchcraft and reads in full as follows:

"The laboratory conditions which the Board requires to be present in a representative election so that the employees can truly and freely exercise their right to vote were not present at this election for causes which are really remarkable.

"In order to appreciate these causes and their effects on the minds of the employees involved in the instant representation proceeding, it is necessary to analyze and comprehend external factors such as the environments, the living conditions, and the cultural heritage prevalent among these employees, all of which are blended to develop the psyche which guides their everyday thinking on the matters presented to them. The nature of our objections lies in the use by certain leaders of the Union of influences clearly unacceptable to the mythical 'reasonable man' or to the *buen padre de familia* of the civil law but which, nevertheless, strongly affects, mentallywise [sic], a great number of the employees of the Employer for the reasons previously stated. Specifically, the acts in question were the following:

"A. A female employee who was a leader for the IAM union movement brought to the plant on the morning of the day of the election a bottle which supposedly contained a magical potion which would cast a spell on the employees. She let it be known to as many employees as possible that this potion had been prepared by a woman at Ponce, considered to be a remarkable *espiritista* (practitioner of sorcery) and supposed to have magical powers. This Union leader utilized this potion in either of two ways. Either she would open the bottle containing the potion to other

employees for them to smell or she wquld put some on her fingers and make a ritualistic sign of the cross on her forehead in front of a group of employees and a similar gesture on the back of her neck. While so doing, she would state that her potion would have the effect of nullifying the will of the employees to vote in any other way but for IAM for one of the labor unions participating in the election.

"B. Another employee IAM union leader instructed his wife to commission a woman who was also reputed to have knowledge on how to make use of supernatural powers to put her uncommon abilities 'to work' for the IAM, for a fee of one hundred and fifty dollars, to prevent the employees of the Employer from voting at the election in any other way than for their particular labor union.

"C. A similar commission was made by another leader of this group to some other person, this time a midget man who did his 'work' from the nearby town of Arecibo. It was not disclosed to the employees what fee was actually paid to this other 'practitioner' in *espiritismo.*

"As previously stated, notwithstanding the fact that a reasonable man would not believe in concoctions, potions or other 'works' prepared or created by persons supposedly possessing supernatural powers, a great number of the employees of the Employer, without a doubt, believe in these phenomena. Many have stated that the results of the election were directly affected by the existence of such external influences. The most common example given by certain employees as evidence of this was that exactly the minute that the election started heavy rain started to fall at the plant grounds and the skies of an otherwise beautiful day suddenly turned black. These employees further stated that on the minute in which the election concluded the skies returned to normal and all raining stopped. Other employees have stated that they felt terribly ill while they were in the process of voting at the election but that the illness disappeared after they had finished doing so. Some others spontaneously advised that a short time after they left the voting area they could not remember their choice at the election. Some of them stated they wanted to vote against the participating organizations but they were so

affected by the *espiritismo* that they could not find on the ballot the alternative 'neither.'

"It is patent from the foregoing that as a result of the deliberate use and the spreading of the information among the employees of such use by and on behalf of the IAM of the foregoing type of *espiritismo* activity, the laboratory conditions required by the Board for the holding of a proper election were completely destroyed for a substantial number of the employees involved."

A "white paper" the Nixon firm also filed in support of their hex claim turned out to be a thoroughly researched document which compressed centuries of witchcraft history into 13 pages. They point out that Puerto Rico is predominently a Catholic country. They then set out to pound home one point, much to the delight of the American witches who have read the paper:

"Belief in witchcraft and sorcery has been an important part of the development of the history and culture of the Western world. . . ."

In their résumé of witchcraft, their paper went on to cite that up to the eighteenth century in Europe the great masses of people at least believed in the effects of witchcraft if they did not actively practice it.

"Such a great threat did this belief constitute to the official and established faith on which, in turn, depended the stability of the state, that hundreds of thousands of persons were arrested and put to death, especially during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for the crime of sorcery," they state.

This makes reference, of course, to the witchcraft trials which began about 1450 and ended about 1750. No one knows for certain the exact number who were executed. Scholars are in disagreement on this point, and there is a wide gap between estimates.

For example, while Rossell Hope Robbins, a British professor and author of *The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology,* uses the figure 200,000, Gerald Gardner, in his book *Witchcraft Today,* has said, "When practically all of the witches were driven underground, it is estimated that 9 million people were tortured to death during the persecutions in Europe." The body count, as we now

refer to such affairs, no longer matters to modern witches. No one I know is on a revenge binge. But what they don't want people to forget today is that during that three-hundred-year witch frenzy, physical torture was an approved practice, since Pope Innocent IV in the thirteenth century sanctioned its use—a position that was not officially abandoned by the Vatican until 1816.

The *Malleus Maleficarum*, commonly called the "Hammer of Witches," is probably the most shocking book I have ever picked up. It first appeared in print in 1486 and sturdily served as the witch-hunting manual for Catholic and Protestant zealot alike. In a quarter of a million words, it set forth in minute and soul-curdling detail the most effective methods of legally wringing confessions from recalcitrant men and women accused of witchcraft. Of course, just as no one knows how many met such a fate, neither does any one know how many victims were innocent of what the Church termed heresy.

Eye gougers, branding irons, spine rollers, and forehead tourniquets are but a small sampling of the simpler instruments designed to fulfill the legal formalities as set forth by the *Malleus Maleficarum*—a book which another witchcraft scholar, Montague Summers, writing in 1946, termed "a noble treatise" and "a very great and very wise book." He, incidentally, translated the work into English. It may still be purchased in bookstores which specialize in occult publications.

Mystery clouds the clerical career of the Reverend Summers who died in 1948. Accounts vary as to when and where he was, or whether he was, ordained in the Roman Catholic Church. He is best known as a world-famous demonologist, and wrote voluminously on devils, vampires, werewolves, angels, saints, seers and sages as well as witches. His most popular book on the latter subject, *Witchcraft and Black Magic*, may be found in paperback today.

He is frequently quoted as an authority on witchcraft. With all due respect to his erudition, which is great, it is my personal evaluation that the Reverend Summers can be more accurately described as an authority on witchcraft *trials*. I am more inclined to believe that the witches today who are—cautiously, it is true—revealing some of the secrets of their practices and beliefs are the true authorities. Such information is, after all, given freely, not wrung from the rack.

Nor is it safe to assume that Summers' impassioned and persuasively written views on the evil nature of witchcraft necessarily reflect the orthodox views of the Church. While he also still enjoys the reputation as an outstanding theologist, none of his books carry the *imprimatur*, or "stamp of approval" as required by Canon Law.

Witches are not particularly interested in the views of Montague Summers or any other scholar who attempts to judge witchcraft from confessions extracted by torture. Actually, they tend to shrink from *any* rehashing of that phase of religious history.

What interests them far more is another point which was made in the Nixon, Mudge paper (the italics are mine):

"According to reputed scholars, when we deal with the practices and rites of witches in Europe we deal with the remains of a pagan religion which survived hundreds of years after the introduction of Christianity."

Every single American witch tried to get this across to me: Witchcraft has been in existence throughout recorded history, but pagans were branded as heretics by the Inquisition, and slaughtered. They went underground and have remained there for four hundred years.

They like this passage, too:

"Traditionally the witch or sorcerer has been a person of tremendous influence in his or her community. For one thousand years up to the eighteenth century practically the only trusted physician in the towns was the local witch. Emperors, kings, popes and the richest nobility commissioned personal physicians from prestigious universities, brought in learned Moors or Jews, but the mass of the people only consulted the 'wise woman' of the neighborhood. If she was not successful in curing she was insulted and denounced as a 'witch.' But generally, they were referred to as the beautiful ladies (*bella donna*) out of profound respect mixed with considerable fear. This name was eventually given to one of the plants which they used in their potions and which possessed strong narcotic traits.

This respect and fear of the witch, sorcerer or priest of a Satanic cult is not only traditional but universal."

American witches carp over that last bit of terminology, as might be expected. Satanists, as I have said, make no such distinction and freely call themselves witches.

But no matter how they choose to classify themselves, can any of them really fly? Witch on a broomstick! This is still the most popular image. How did it begin?

The phenomenon of flying can be traced to the witchcraft trials when witches confessed that they flew to their assignations with the Devil. It was called "transvection."

Nixon, Mudge report on this:

"Most of them," they said, "sincerely believed that they had powers of levitation and could 'fly' to the appointed place for the Sabbath or 'witches feast' on broomsticks or other objects or on the backs of animals or human beings.

"Add to this the fact that prior to setting out for these hallucinatory meetings the witches rubbed themselves with special ointments, many of which had narcotic qualities. These concoctions affected the nervous system and often induced hypnotic sleep or feelings of physical release which closely resembled that of flying.

"The ointments and potions produced their effect very rapidly, since they were rubbed on the soft membranes of the body or their vapors inhaled and thus conveyed almost immediately into the blood-stream."

There seems to be some truth to this matter. Hallucinogenic drugs must have been well known to witches many centuries ago and were probably used to induce "psychic" trips, very much in the same way LSD is used today.

Several have told me that they possess an ancient formula for the "flying ointment" but won't say how they came by it. Joe is one. He explained the principle of it to me like this:

"It's a combination of water hemlock, aconite, deadly nightshade (belladonna), cinquefoil, mandragora (mandrake root) and soot—mixed in oil. If you brewed up a batch, it would look and smell like rancid axle grease."

"Could I make it?" I asked.

"Certainly not," he snapped. He was somewhat annoyed.

"Why?" I persisted.

"First of all, you haven't a clue as to the right proportions or how to combine them. Second, you couldn't buy all the ingredients. Third, it could kill you."

"Why?" I asked, knowing virtually nothing about the properties of the ingredients he had mentioned.

"Aconite and belladonna are poisonous and the water hemlock is highly toxic. The aconite upsets the heartbeat; belladonna can produce delirium; the hemlock, excitement and possibly some temporary paralysis," he explained patiently.

"What would it do if you rubbed it onto the skin?"

"Send you on a trip," he answered facetiously.

It would appear that the reason the Nixon paper brought up the legendary "flying ointment" at all was because, in their suit, they alleged that employees of the firm they represented were "made to inhale a supposedly magical potion."

What engrossed American witches most of all about the Nixon, Mudge, Rose, Guthrie and Alexander affair, however, was the final point they chose to use for summation. They repeated (again, the italics are mine):

"It is our position that the *laboratory conditions* which the Board requires for its elections were in fact *destroyed* at the very moment that the factor of *supernatural forces* was injected into the receptive minds of a group of workers in this representative election."

Witches have been challenged too often to prove that their magic works to let such a statement pass unnoticed. They maintain it is an acknowledgment from an impeccable Establishment source of their power to perform magic.

I don't completely agree with their line of reasoning. I think witches in their eagerness for vindication overstate the case in this instance. To me, this paragraph raised other questions.

First of all, I was intrigued by the use of the phrase "laboratory conditions" in relation to an election.

Does it, or doesn't it, imply control? That is what scientists usually mean when they use the term. So did Ed Fitch, the electronics engineer and witch, when he used the same analogy to explain how magic works, as he sees

it. But what do these lawyers mean when they use the term in this context?

And what does *anyone* mean when they use the phrase "receptive minds"? Aren't all minds receptive to something? Who decides what that "something" should or shouldn't be? You? Me? Nixon, Mudge, Rose, Guthrie and Alexander?

4. Portrait of a Witch

Despite being 5 feet 2 and weighing 200 to 250 pounds, depending upon the current state of his casual attitude toward dieting, Joe is as light as a perfectly turned-out dumpling.

The first thing you notice is, of course, that he is short and fat. But, even at first sight, the word "heavy" won't flit through your mind for the simple reason that he couldn't make an awkward gesture if he tried.

He walks toward you with the grace and assurance of a Nureyev, and as soon as he speaks, the softly modulated voice, rich with humor, dominates the room.

His hair is thick and lustrous and very, very dark, a heritage from his Hungarian-Spanish (with a trace of American Indian) lineage. So is his ivory-smooth skin. He himself describes his face as "soft." But the softness is molded by compassion, not weakness, and is spiced by a touch of the mischievous.

His eyes are a clear, cool, magnetic green, large and deeply set and protected by squarish lenses framed in black which also correct a simple near-sightedness.

He has worn the glasses for twenty years. The beard is a newer acquisition; he let it grow when he was bored while convalescing from a bout with pneumonia. Now it is neatly trimmed to a trident shape.

He was born under the sign of Pisces, whose ruling planet is Neptune. The symbol of Neptune is the trident and indicates the threefold nature of man—physical, mental and spiritual. The beard suits his face.

His manner of dress is casual: dark slacks and a loose uncollared tunic-type, custom-tailored shirt, usually in a

muted shade of green or blue. At least that's the way it was when I first knew him. The last batch of tunics he ordered came in orange, sky blue, yellow—even a tapestry one.

I think he has burst forth in all these colors simply because men's fashions have jazzed up a lot in the last two years. Relax the conventions which have ruled the style of male attire and you're going to see an eye-blinding male witch!

It's the same story with jewelry. Here is the way Joe's jewelry situation was when I first knew him: He wore a silver Maltese cross, set with coral and turquoise stones, and a gold chain with a gold pentagram around his neck. Sometimes, at home, he'd add a string of sandalwood beads.

As for rings, his prize possession was, and still is, a four-thousand-year-old green Egyptian scarab set in heavy gold. He wears that on the little finger of his left hand. He often slips a gold pentagram ring on the index finger of the right hand.

That, too, has changed. Now I know that Joe has no more control than a crow where his fascination with anything that glitters is concerned. He says he often uses gems and metals in magic, explaining his indulgence that way. He can't afford to gratify his passion for precious gems. Right now, he is getting by on a black star sapphire and a diamond ring.

But he is, self-admittedly, a jewelry freak. It would be entirely possible to bury him alive under the mountain of silver and gold necklaces, charms, amulets, beads and bracelets of all kinds and from all nations that he is constantly accumulating.

When Joe goes out, of course, he does restrain himself and wears only a few pieces at a time. But for six weeks, not too long ago, he had to wear a gold stud in his left ear twenty-four hours a day while the pierced hole healed. That drew a few stares. Again, he says this is a new prop to his magic and that, during rituals, he will wear a solid gold loop in that ear. He had talked of having his ear pierced ever since I got to know him well. Then, quite suddenly one afternoon, he appeared at my apartment and asked me to make the rounds of jewelry stores with him

since he had decided this piece of minor surgery had to be done that day.

We drove around to several places, but without success, and finally came back to my house to fix supper. I thought no more of it, but Joe was obsessed. Finally, he disappeared upstairs, and ten minutes later appeared wearing a big grin and a loop of dental floss in his left ear lobe. He'd gotten a needle, sterilized it with alcohol he found in the bathroom, jabbed the hole, and drew the dental floss through. A couple of hours later, feeling a little squeamish, I got a gold stud earring from my jewelry box, and slipping the dental floss out, eased it into place.

Personal appearance aside, Joe is, at thirty-one, an accomplished musician. But he doesn't play professionally anymore. He gave music up as a career in order to devote himself full-time to his psychic work. It will still come as a surprise to many of his clients to learn here, for the first time, that Joseph Robert Lukach is also a witch.

Joe was born to witchcraft.

When he was six months old, Blanquita, High Priestess of a voodoo cult from Santo Domingo and a family friend, told his grandmother that he had been "born with the power." She did not tell his mother and father as well. Joe was, after all, their first-born.

"But I always suspected," his mother told me. She turned to her son, patted him lovingly on the arm and laughed.

"Oh, honey," she said, "you were a strange one!"

Jennie Gonzalez Lukach is a small, warmly vivacious woman approaching fifty. Her hair is short and curly, all chestnut brown with streaks of gold. She, like her son, wears glasses, but her eyes are a sherry brown instead of sparkling green. Jennie's personality lifts you like a balmy day in early fall, when there is a nip in the air. The camaraderie between mother and son is immediately apparent.

My curiosity was heightened by Jennie's affectionate, but unusual, remark.

She and I whipped through the statistics rapidly. Joe was a full-term baby, delivered normally at 7:30 P.M. on Feb-

ruary 27, 1939, at a hospital just a few blocks away from where he now lives. He weighed in at 7 pounds, 3 ounces. Nothing strange in any of this.

"And such a good baby," Jennie said. "He slept practically all of the time. The nurse would bring him to me for feeding and she would have to tickle the bottoms of his feet to wake him up. When he opened his eyes, you could see they were green—not blue like other babies."

The first hint that Joe might be radically different from other babies came from Blanquita. I was anxious to meet her. I already knew that Blanquita had given Joe his early training in magic and witchcraft.

When I met Blanquita personally for the first time, she confirmed what I had already been told about her early impressions of Joe.

Blanquita, who has lived in New York for some forty years, has acquired only a casual command of English. My Spanish is confined to minor pleasantries. But when she undertook to explain to me her first impressions of a six-month-old baby, her expressive eyes and flashing hands almost completely succeeded in conveying the full story.

Jennie and Joe, who are both fluent in Spanish, translated nuances which would have otherwise been lost. Blanquita said she took one look at the baby and promptly told Jennie's mother, Nana, that Joe "had a Dom"—the Spanish term for a person born with highly developed psychic gifts.

"The beauty of the soul was here—not male nor female. It is the sum of the best of both which gives him the power to understand the destinies of the men and women he has been born to serve," she told me.

"Only one in ten million is so chosen from birth. Some of us receive our powers through revelation. Mine came to me in that way when I was thirteen. The majority of us are born with latent powers and must work long and hard to develop them fully.

"Do not," she warned Nana, "expect this child to grow up to be a family man like others. It is not his destiny."

For almost eighteen years, this conversation remained a secret between Blanquita and his grandmother. But Blanquita was always close by to offer guidance in the intervening years.

Joe had already told me one of the family stories about this same grandmother and how she had saved the life of her daughter—his mother—through the power of witchcraft.

Jennie was born in Key West, Florida. When she was an infant, she almost died of dysentery, gradually losing weight until she was little but skin and bones. Jennie became so fragile that she had to be carried about on a pillow when it was necessary to handle her at all.

Her mother had made the rounds of the doctors. Witchcraft, after all, was considered superstition and she was determined to depend upon the miracles of science to save her child. When she exhausted all of their remedies, and Jennie continued to fail, she realized that the life of her baby daughter was at stake. As a last resort, she took Jennie to Cuba and sought out a *curandero,* or healer.

He told her that if Jennie was to live at all, she must be fed the milk of a mare.

"And here I am today," Jennie told me sprightly. "When Mama brought me back to Key West from Cuba, she bought a mare with a colt and when the colt finished sucking, Mama milked the mare and fed the milk to me in a bottle," she said.

Jennie Gonzalez moved to New York with her parents when she was three years old. When she was eighteen, she took a job as a waitress at a resort hotel in Maine. There she fell in love with, and married, Joseph Lukach, the pastry chef. Joe Jr., was born a year later. Tony followed two years later, and Gloria three years after that. Neither of them presented special problems, she assured me. But Joe—

When Joe was ten months old, he began to talk.

"We called him the Professor," Jennie said. "There was no chatter—no gurgling—no baby talk from this one. He spoke very clearly and very precisely. But he wouldn't talk to just anyone."

Joe picked up the story.

"I can remember saying 'Hello.' I even remember that there were people I refused to say even that much to, just because I didn't want them around. I couldn't describe how I felt—I can't even today—so I yelled. But now I do

know that I reacted that way because their vibrations were bad."

"You yelled a lot, Joey," Jennie agreed amiably. "Oddly enough, Susan, one of the people who scared him most was Blanquita."

"I remember that, Ma. I was so scared of her power I would run under the table. I was hiding from her power—not from Blanquita."

"And you spent a lot of time under the table," Jennie pointed out.

Joe and Jennie both speak of his unusual response to music at that time.

Jennie said, "In the evenings, Big Joe liked to play the accordion. It was a hobby with him. So, after I would soothe Joey and get him sound asleep in his crib, his father would bring out the accordion and start to play. And, every single time, Joey would promptly wake up and cry."

Joe said, "My response to music has always been a highly emotional one. I could only express my emotions by crying. There was no other way. Sure, I can remember crying my heart out because of the sound and the feeling it produced in me."

Both agree it was pretty tough on Papa.

"Joey walked when he was fourteen months old," Jennie told me. "And, there again, he was a good little boy. He didn't get into things. He was curious, sure, like all little children. But never, never destructive."

Jennie paused to light a cigarette.

"My main problem with Joey at that age was"—and Jennie smiled at us both—"he did most of his walking at night."

Joe was a chronic somnambulist.

From Jennie's point of view it was a very difficult period.

From Joe's point of view, it was sheer hell.

"I would rock him and coax him and love him so he would go to sleep," she said.

"And I would cry and scream. From pure fear, nothing else. Even today I remember the fear," he said.

Joe is unique in that he has total recall. Today, as an adult, his memories of the apparitions and visitations which

came to him in sleep are as vivid as they were when he was a small, inarticulate child. Many children, of course, go through periods of resisting sleep because they are, from time to time, "afraid of the dark." Then they outgrow it and it is accepted as "part of a phase of growing up."

Jennie is unique in that she never once allowed his night terrors to panic her into punishment of any sort. Nor did she attempt to convince him that his fears were all in his imagination. As a twenty-year-old mother coping with a first child, she accepted her strange young son completely.

I asked her whether she had ever thought of consulting a psychologist to help her with these problems, as they persisted throughout his childhood and showed no signs of abating.

She considered my question for a moment and then dismissed it as utter nonsense.

"Just because a child is different is no sign there is anything wrong with him. He's just different, that's all," she said firmly.

Joe spoke up at this point. "I think a lot of kids go through what I did in some degree or another. I think more do than we suppose. It is the lack of knowledge on the part of the parents—or the psychologists—which might make my experience seem like a rare thing. It isn't rare at all. Kids just learn to keep their mouths shut about their nighttime—or nightmare—experiences. And parents are too quick to assume they have an 'emotionally disturbed' child on their hands—whatever that is supposed to mean—when they have nightmares. Actually, they *may* have a kid who has psychic awareness."

Joe's convictions on this point are very strong. He firmly believes that much psychic talent is being stamped out today in its blossoming stages by parents who are determined to follow whatever rules of behavior are currently considered fashionable so they can assure themselves they have "normal children."

He is certain that many children are considered "strange" simply because they have been born with psychic ability—sometimes called "second sight"—and are too young to know how to conceal their inborn knowledge so it is not

threatening to the more prosaic attitudes of their less sensitive elders.

While Joe can remember his constant crying episodes and the feelings which brought them on, his earliest visual recall goes back to a time when he was three years old.

"At night, when I was asleep, apparitions appeared to me and talked, waking me up. One in particular was a woman who used to come into my room and carry me away out of my bed. I was afraid of her," he said.

Jennie confirmed this.

"In the morning, when I would go into Joe's bedroom to get him, he wouldn't be in his bed," she said. "Instead, often he would be behind the armchair in the corner of his room, asleep. Did he walk there in his sleep? I assume so. He always told me he had been carried there. I always accepted his explanation without question."

About this time of his young life, he had discovered the stars and at night, would toddle outside, point up toward Venus and announce solemnly, "*That* is my real home," Jennie told me.

"And often," she added soberly, "when I was having coffee in the kitchen with friends, Joey would come wandering in, wringing his little hands and asking plaintively 'where's my mama'?"

"I would take him on my lap and comfort that lonely, lost little soul as best I could." Jennie was pensive. "He didn't reject me," she added slowly.

"How could I? You were a lovely, warm lady," Joe said, teasing her.

Jennie, when asked to sum up his early childhood, used one word: "confusing."

Joe just shrugged and said, "I groped my way through my early life. It was easy when I was home, but when I went to school—well. . . ."

He spent a long time wondering why he had to go to school in the first place.

"Do you remember your first day in school, Joe?" I asked.

"Very clearly. I didn't like it. I didn't want to stay. I was five years old and it was kindergarten time. I didn't like That Lady they were going to leave me with. I wasn't

scared. Just unhappy. I remember thinking, 'I don't have to do this.' "

"Didn't you want to learn to read and write?"

"I already could."

Jennie said this was quite true. "From the time Joey could walk, he would try to read when we were out on the streets. He was a determined little rascal, so I would read him all of the signs we passed. He was, as we said, the Professor. By the time he was old enough to enter school, he really could read and write. He even covered the first three years' work in the first grade," she said.

Meanwhile, at home, Joe had developed a great thing about fire. Again, this was not the interest many children display when they play with matches and become fascinated by objects which can be made to burn. Joe was only fascinated by watching the fire itself.

"And when he was first able to talk, he was perfectly content to sit quietly and talk to it—the gas flame on the stove, burning candles, any fire at all would do," Jennie said.

Joe laughed.

"Even as a little kid, I instinctively knew there was power in the fire element, I guess. By the time I got into school, I made the discovery that if I went home and talked to fire and asked it to do something for me, it did. It worked. We didn't have a fireplace, so I took to building little fires in the sink in the bathroom and talking to it about my problems."

"What kind of problems, Joe?" I interrupted.

"Nothing specific. Not then. At that age, fire was just my protection against the outside world. All kids get in scraps. I never did. Other kids didn't pick on me. I never had a fight with another kid. I was never backed to the point where I had to defend myself or rely on physical strength. I guess I knew even then that I needed protection since I wasn't physically aggressive anyway. Even today, I don't think I could hit anyone hard enough to hurt them even if I tried," he said.

"Did you play with other kids?"

"Oh, sure. I had friends. But I was choosey. Put it this way. I never felt the need of having a lot of friends for

the sake of being gregarious. I never belonged to a group—or a gang—I simply never wanted to. It would be completely untrue if you said I *retreated* into my own world. I *had* my own world. It never dawned on me to question that mine was not the only way."

"Did you like to play with toys?" I asked.

Jennie joined in. "Joey, do you remember the first Christmas when you asked Santa Claus to bring you something special?" She turned to me. "He was about four, I believe," she explained.

"Sure, I remember, Ma," he said.

"And what did you want?" I asked.

Both of them laughed and exchanged looks, deciding which one would answer. Jennie did. "A chemistry set," she announced.

"Why not?" Joe was still laughing. "After all, I was a baby alchemist."

It was when he was five years old, they agreed, that he demanded a Magic Set.

"So, Santa Claus brought him one," Jennie said.

"Now that nearly broke my heart," Joe said. He turned to me. "You see," he explained, "I found out at once that this was trick magic. The 'now-you-see-it, now-you-don't' variety. That is not what I had in mind at all."

"You also wanted a cape so you could fly," Jennie responded.

"I still do," he countered.

"Joe," I interrupted, "when did it first occur to you that you were different from other kids—aside from your choice of toys?"

"I don't really know," he answered, serious now. "By the time I was in the sixth grade, I began to realize *how* different I was. Until then, I guess I just took it for granted that everyone else knew and heard and saw the same things I did."

"Like what?"

"Well, the most obvious one was that if I was in a room with three people present and I saw four or five, I assumed everyone else saw them, too," he said.

"I was genuinely surprised when it finally occurred to me that no one else experienced these same things. At that

point, I accepted my difference quickly—and learned to keep my mouth shut," he added.

"With your family, too?"

"No. Not with them. Never with them. And there was always Blanquita."

Jennie interrupted. "But in school it was not so easy for him," she said. "When Joey was in the first grade, his teacher called me in to talk with her. I will never forget it. I went through that same scene, time and time again with minor variations, through his entire school career. Always the teacher or counselor would begin by saying, 'Mrs. Lukach, your son is a daydreamer.' The only other phrase they substituted was, 'Your son is withdrawn.' "

Jennie grew very thoughtful as she considered his school years.

"You know, Susan," she said finally, "his grades were always good. He wasn't failing. He never got into trouble like some other children did. But over and over again, year after year, his father and I would hear the same comment." Jennie was getting a trace of acid in her tone of voice. "Joe," she said, "he just didn't *act* like other children."

When Joe was eight years old, he began to take the accordion lessons which were to lead him, in succeeding years, into a successful career as a professional musician. Prior to playing professionally, he formed an accordion quartet, and for five years running, won the national contest sponsored by the American Accordionist Association. Did you ever hear Ravel's *Bolero* played on an accordion? I've heard Joe play it and it's quite a tour de force. Oddly enough, Joe loathes playing the accordion. He began the lessons in order to please his father, who was, he said, a frustrated musician. He gave up his musical career in order to fulfill what he believes to be his own personal destiny.

Adolescence has been defined by the greatest of all authors (Anon.) as "the time of life in which one explores the self when there is so little self to explore." Many parents, myself included, have taken refuge in this viewpoint when we have lived through those tempestuous times of emotional trial and error with our children.

No such period of maturation seems to have existed for Joe. I am making this statement only after long conversa-

tions with his mother, his father, his sister and brother, not to mention his cousins, who are the children of his mother's sister, Olga. To sum up hours of such talk:

His father said, "Joe was hardheaded. You could never get through to him. By that, I mean you could never influence him. If he wasn't interested in what you had to say, it went in one ear and out the other. He was polite. He was well behaved. He was that way when he was a little kid. He was that way when he was in his teens. He's that way today. He never changed."

His mother said, "For a simple example, when Joey was a small child he wanted a purple shirt. I refused to buy him one. In those days, I probably couldn't have found one, even if I tried. But, the point is, Joey never demanded, he never whined. He never coaxed.

"And when he was fourteen, he still wanted a purple shirt. He still did when he was fifteen. I gave up and went all over New York until I found one. He wore it for Easter."

His sister, Gloria, his brother, Tony, and his cousins, Peter and Chris, Olga's sons, being several years his junior, can contribute little more to this phase of Joe's life, except to agree that he was, in Jennie's words, "a strange one." But the differences which set Joe apart did not spell alienation. The differences still exist, yet they are a close-knit family.

Jennie and Olga believe that Blanquita influenced his transition from childhood to adulthood.

"It was at this time that she began to play a larger role in his life," they say.

Joe admits this, too.

"When I began to mature, it was Blanquita who guided me more and more into the mysteries of the powers she had identified when I was a baby. She was gradually showing me how to use—not misuse them," he said.

When Joe was in junior high school, at a time of life when most young boys are learning about the physical temptations of life and how to indulge them, Joe learned a psychic lesson which he has not forgotten to this day. Joe and Jennie told me about it.

"I went to Junior High Thirty on Eighty-eighth Street between Second and Third Avenues in Manhattan," he recalled. "Because I had gotten to be good at the accordion, I was always asked to play for the various school assemblies. There was this other kid going to the same school. He was never asked, and, I guess, it bugged him. Anyway, one afternoon after school in the auditorium, he really beat the hell out of me.

"Two other guys were in the auditorium at the time, and they kept saying 'Hit him back, Joe, hit him back.' I never did. It never occurred to me to hit him. All I thought at the time was—you'll be sorry."

Jennie remembers the occasion vividly. "When Joey came home he was a mess. His face was cut up; he had a black eye. I was furious. I said I was going to school the next day—for the first time *they* weren't sending for *me*—and raise hell. But Joey just kept saying, 'No, Ma, leave me alone.' "

She left him alone.

He built a fire in the bathroom sink.

Two days later, his adversary fell down a flight of stairs at school and broke both arms. He was completely out of the sight or reach of Joe.

Jennie didn't know about the fire but she was terrified by the coincidence, she said.

Joe added, "It had a sobering effect on me, too. I began to understand for the first time from first-hand experience what Blanquita was trying to teach me—psychic power has to be handled with great restraint. I had gotten away from the kid habit of building a fire for my protection when I might feel threatened. And, in any event, I had never used it *against* anyone before. I realized then that I needed to acquire wisdom as well."

Joe, when he was graduated from junior high school, attended the High School of Music and Art, a specialized high school in New York City with selective admissions for talented young musicians and artists. His years there were bland. "Marking time," he calls it. Even so, while obeying all the rules and regulations, passing all academic courses with ease, developing his skill as an accordionist and learning the violin as well, he still caused concern from his teachers. To the vast relief of everyone, he was graduated in 1956 and soon joined the teaching staff of

the Biviano School of Music in New York. He himself had been an early student there.

By the time he was twenty, he was also playing regular engagements with the Angie Bond trio—piano, bass and Joe at the accordion. For the next three years, Joe taught by day and played by night in supper clubs throughout the New York and New Jersey areas. When he was twenty-three, he put down the accordion and has never picked it up again except to play for friends in the privacy of his own home.

To say that Joe loves and knows music is to understate the case by a very wide margin.

"It is the life of a musician I finally couldn't take," he said. "When I would put down that accordion at night, it was like taking out my heart for a while, to give it a rest. It was too much a part of me. Then there was the drinking. For three years, I guess it was Moët Chandon for breakfast, often with strawberries. Why not? The day of a musician usually begins when everyone else's ends. But it wasn't the drinking—it was the drunks. Their sick vibrations were killing me."

Today, except for his own pleasure, and that of his friends, he insists that he has cut music cold.

"But why?" I persisted.

"I had to," he answered. He is frank to admit that he enjoyed that part of his life to the fullest while it lasted. When he felt himself prepared to move on into what he considers the broadest field of all—magic—he gave up music with no regrets.

He explained that throughout his musical career, he had never discontinued his studies of magic or lessened his own personal involvement in witchcraft. And, as he reminded me, Blanquita was always at his shoulder.

At some point during his musical career he was initiated into the craft. Precisely when, where and how this event occurred is his own secret. Most American witches do not ordinarily discuss this step with outsiders, at least insofar as I have been able to discover. Joe is no exception. If pressed for factual information on this, or any other topic that witches prefer not to reveal, most of them evade a direct question by politely and calmly saying whatever happens to pop into their mind at the moment. Joe warned me that when the protection of their personal secrets is at stake, their skill at dissimulation comes to their rescue.

I had always assumed that when Joe decided to quit his musical career, he must have had a neat piece of change saved up between his years of teaching and playing.

"Not so," he denied. "I was flat broke. I spent every dime as fast as it came in. But I made it."

Today, Joe is still a teacher, but of magic, not music. He has gathered around him a small, select few who are serious students of the mysteries of magic. Some will go on to become witches in their own right. Others will not. It is only these few—in addition to old and trusted friends—who have known that he practices witchcraft as a religion.

When I first knew Joe, he did all of his psychic work from an apartment in a high-rise luxury apartment on the fashionable East Side of New York.

Joe's apartment, in the language of New York real estate agents, which I have never fully understood, would have been described as a "three-and-a-half." For all practical purposes, this means that the apartment had a separate bedroom. Nothing in the figure-and-fraction parlance of the New York landlord, however, gives a clue as to the size of such rooms.

In Joe's case, the living and dining areas were large, open and L-shaped, bedroom and bath separated by a hall. He repainted one wall of the living room a deep, warm blue, contrasting the color against the other walls, which were an off-white. He paneled the dining area with brick and partially separated the two rooms with iron grillwork.

His furniture is dark, massive and Spanish in design. There was just enough of it to give a castle effect; not enough to overpower or oppress. He installed a complete stereo and tape recording system in what were originally Spanish wine cabinets.

Scattered throughout the rooms were various artifacts related to witchcraft and the occult. Some are merely curios; some are quite valuable. All blended naturally into the decor. Except that Joe obviously burned a lot of candles and there was always a hint of incense, nothing would

lead you to believe that you were in the home of a witch. One small bookcase held a modest display of various occult writings, most of them in the popular vein. It would be only natural to jump to the conclusion that his interest in the subject was only a hobby. Actually, several closets were crammed with books on magic and witchcraft. Many of these are extremely obscure works. All of them were well worn from use.

The surest clue to Joe's real life is always to be found in his kitchen, no matter where he might live. Although he keeps the major part of his collection of unusual herbs under lock and key in a wardrobe-sized cabinet in his sleeping quarters (he keeps at least 150 on hand at all times), some always wind up in the kitchen when Joe is cooking and sit on the shelves along with the everyday oregano and garlic and other commonly known kitchen necessities.

Joe loves to cook. Being the son of a chef, he grew up accustomed to gourmet foods—Jennie never cooked a meal in her life. When he branched out on his own, he not only took with him all the professional culinary tricks of the trade he had picked up from his father, but he also added his own vast specialized knowledge of herbs. He's compiled recipes for years and is writing a cookbook.

Illemanzer, a Manx cat, shared these quarters. The cat, of course, is called his *familiar*, the domestic animal that no self-respecting witch is supposed to be without.

The concept of the familiar is buried deep in witchcraft lore. According to legend, the familiar was given to the witch by the Devil to serve as a faithful helper. While all witches I know laugh at that legend, most of them do seem to have a special love of animals and keep domestic pets of many kinds. Today, the major purpose of the familiar is to avert a curse—but more of that later. Without question, their favorite pet is a cat. Pyewacket has always been a favored name. Vinegar Tom is another, as is Jamara. Witches, incidentally, have great fun with names, not necessarily because of any particular meaning the names might have in magic, but simply because of the sounds the syllables produce.

Today, however, Illemanzer is living with Jennie, and Joe's furniture is in storage. Like many another New

Yorker, Joe was caught in a rent squeeze when controls were lifted from new buildings. He simply couldn't afford the jolt in rent when his lease expired.

Why didn't he resort to magic to roll back the rent? Joe says he can't make magic work for personal profit.

Why?

It's almost a paraphrase of the eternal question: "If you're so smart, why aren't you rich?"

Witches are forever being asked why. Joe has had to answer this more often than most because he now supports himself through his psychic talents, whereas the vast majority of other witches hold regular jobs. In addition to the Tarot readings, he has started to gain a reputation as an occult critic for a few small specialized publications, such as *Jazz and Pop*.

The answer to this question is simple enough to understand, once the essential nature of a witch is understood. Joe is just not materialistic. Neither are any of the other witches I know. They like money well enough and enjoy living in comfort just like the rest of us.

"But acts of magic require an enormous amount of energy and concentration," Joe says. "From time to time, I think about using it for me. But I just can't work myself up to the pitch necessary. In other words, I can't concentrate on myself to that degree."

One of his favorite stories concerns a regular client who asked him to handicap horses for him. Joe used his psychic talents—not magic—and came up with winners week after week. "Then," he says chuckling, "I got the bright idea I'd put some money down, too. So I got my friend to place $20 on the nose of a nag I figured was a sure winner. What happened? That horse led the field all the way—and dropped dead in the final lap!"

So, when it came to his rent increase, he went the conventional route, negotiated with the building management and got exactly nowhere. He was all prepared to pay the allowed 15-percent increase on a three-year lease. However, in order to get the clause written which would allow him to keep Illemanzer, it was suggested that he pay an extra $900 ($300 a year, payable in advance) for this "special privilege."

Joe declined, and prepared to move. I went over the day he made that decision to talk to him about other apartments I had seen. When I got there, Joe was preoccupied and wandering around restlessly. He finally told me that he had lost his Egyptian scarab ring and couldn't find it anywhere. He thought that perhaps Illemanzer had knocked it off a table, pawed it playfully around and scooted it underneath his front door into the hall corridor. However, he'd vainly checked the length of the corridor, and was now morose about the loss, as well as depressed about the expiring lease. Just then the intercom phone in the kitchen rang. It was the Super. When Joe came back into the living room, he was white with rage.

"That son-of-a-bitch told me he'd picked it up," he said angrily. "But will he return it? No. He says"—and Joe began to mimic a heavy Germanic accent—" 'Mr. Lukach, is worth a lot to you? Huh?' I told him it was worth a lot—but only to me. So then he says, 'Oh, in that case then, maybe just a bottle of vodka for the return. Huh? Good vodka?' "

As soon as Joe repeated the conversation, he headed for the phone, called the neighborhood liquor store and ordered a quart of their most expensive brand. It arrived within minutes. Joe hadn't said another word. He paced up and down, waiting for the delivery. And, as soon as he got his hands on the bottle, he went into a frenzy of action. He grabbed it, muttered over it, and leaving the seal intact, sprinkled it carefully and deliberately with a clear liquid from a vial he had put on the small makeshift altar he had hurriedly set up in the corner. He lit a candle and stood there at the altar, clutching the bottle and chanting prayers in Spanish. I sat quietly on his couch. Then, he turned to me and smiled. There was no mischief in his eyes now, but there was plenty of malice. Before I had a chance to say anything, the doorbell rang and there stood the Super. Joe merely handed him the bottle, accepted his ring in return and quietly shut the door. As soon as it was closed, he came dancing back into the living room on the balls of his feet.

"You cursed that man, Joe," I said.

"No, I didn't," he denied happily. "I fixed him."

"And what's the difference?" I asked.

"Plenty. A curse goes on and on, often for a lifetime, and affects everyone close to the person who has been cursed. Now, a fix is thrown out to do just that—give a person a real, hard kick wherever it will hurt the worst. Then it's over."

He was relieved. He'd been hassled and harassed, pressured and worried on too many fronts at once. The missing ring tipped the balance of his temper. He was bone angry, and, like anyone else, he exploded. Under the same circumstances, I would probably have heaved a paste pot. Joe let fly with the handiest—and deadliest—weapon at hand. His magic.

When his anger abated, he was not the least remorseful. For a week, I followed Joe's almost daily reports on the Super's subsequent downfall from favor with the building management. All the porters in the building, mostly Puerto Ricans and Spanish-speaking, kept him posted. The first day, the Super insulted a young girl who came into the lobby, not knowing that she was the daughter of the woman who lived in the penthouse apartment, the most expensive one in the building. He was publicly called down for his rudeness.

The second day, for reasons no one has been able to fathom, he impulsively added bleach to the rug shampoo one porter was using to clean the hall carpeting. It promptly faded from a deep, rich red, to a mottled pink and had to be completely replaced.

The third day, he drank some of the vodka. He didn't drink enough to get drunk, or so he said. But he got so sick he had to take off a couple of days.

By the end of the week, he'd managed to lose his set of master keys to the building and the manager lost his patience.

The Super was fired, and he moved out before Joe did.

Joe is also a medium. His major spirit guide is Edan, and for the last few years, Joe has been capable of going into a trance to serve as an instrument through which Edan manifests himself. He consents to do this only to allow

others personally to hear Edan's voice, which Joe has heard silently for many years, and to benefit from his advice.

He refuses to use this ability to bring back voices or messages from those who have left the earth plane in order to comfort those who are still on it.

Nor does he form a seance group for a fee. He considers Edan a friend and mentor and will only introduce him to others who are willing to accept him in the same manner.

Naturally, I asked for such an introduction. Joe agreed readily enough, and one evening he and I met with a mutual friend who had spoken with Edan before. He was with us in order to make the introduction and to pave the way for me, since this was to be my first experience in talking with a spirit from a different plane.

The three of us had a very pleasant dinner, and when Joe was ready, we cleared away the dishes, lowered the lights and sat informally around the dining room table.

There were no props, such as I had read about. Nor was the room in darkness. Joe burned incense and lit a candle. In this instance, the candle was not even a necessary adjunct. It was merely pleasant and gave all three of us a sense of well-being and relaxation.

When we were comfortably settled, Joe removed his glasses, concentrated on the candle flame for a second or two, then closed his eyes. From that point to the trance stage took less than five minutes.

Joe's lips moved silently and then his head began to droop. His fingers, placed on top of the table, began to twitch. His head began to rise again, and when it did, it was quite obvious even in the softened light that his color had fled. He was now quite sallow. His eyelids were twitching. Then his lips began to move, assuming an expression totally alien to his normal look. There was a soft sigh, then the gentle words, "Good evening." Joe was gone. Edan was present.

The voice was soft and deliberate and detached. The turn of phrase was often archaic. The words were lightly accented, precisely enunciated, with a slight rolling of the sound *r*. I found it impossible to identify it with any foreign accent I had ever heard.

The introduction was swiftly made and acknowledged. I asked permission to tape-record. There was a long pause.

"You have my permission," Edan said. This was the first time such permission had ever been granted.

Our interview lasted for about a half hour. Always there were long pauses between my questions and his answers. I found it disconcerting and, yes, a little awesome to hold a conversation with a disembodied voice. His words were simple enough, as I heard them. But the quiet conviction and the authority which rested behind them carried quite an impact, as I discovered in the days which followed our conversation, and I began to examine the transcript. Because Edan called me Susan throughout our conversation, I repeat it here exactly as it was recorded:

SUSAN: How long have you been guiding Joe?

EDAN: I have been guiding Joe since he is seventeen years old. But, no, he was not aware of this until later. His conscious awareness was about four years ago. It was not necessary until then, since he was not doing transmediumship.

SUSAN: Do you guide only Joe?

EDAN: As a guide, I am only with Joe.

SUSAN: Why Joe?

EDAN: When the spirit on the earth plane is ready to receive this guidance, we in the spirit world are aware of it. There must be harmony for this. It is this harmony which attracts the guide. Joe and I are similar in many respects. We are both teachers. I have been a teacher for a very long time. My last incarnation was 2,400 years ago.

SUSAN: Will you return?

EDAN: I know now that I will reincarnate for a mission as a teacher.

SUSAN: When?

EDAN: I cannot answer when.

SUSAN: But why?

EDAN: My purpose in this is for spiritual development —my own and for others. A teacher learns from his students as well.

SUSAN: Spiritual development, Edan? What of today's religions?

EDAN: As I see, organized religions are disintegrating. I do not see them being revived as they have been for 2,000 years. New ones will replace them.

SUSAN: Organized ones?

EDAN: Will these be organized, you ask? Susan, when many believe, it *becomes* organized.

For the first, and only time, one word was slightly more emphasized than another. I asked him to explain further.

EDAN: Religion will become closer to the truth. Now it is confusion. In two years, perhaps, I see the passing away of many important religious figures known to the earth plane. They will reincarnate almost immediately to return and teach a higher spirituality.

SUSAN: What of this era, Edan? Is it better, or worse, than ever?

EDAN: The time in which you are living is very confused. The violence and disorder of the earth plane is a necessary step along the way in the evolvement of the Universe. It is no different now than it has been for a very long time. Now it is become a part of everybody's thinking. Many things that before were hidden are now coming out into the light of day.

SUSAN: Do you mean rebellion—knowledge of the occult—or what?

EDAN: Everything. Rebellion is a manifestation of truth hidden for a long time. Violence and disorders of the world have not yet come to a peak. Unless there is a great concentration of prayer and meditation, it will be worse. Prayer is a powerful force. Everyday, more people pray. This is not known. More is needed.

SUSAN: What is the biggest single problem in the world today?

EDAN: There is nothing I can say what [sic] has not been said. It has not been understood. Anger of

people toward each other who cannot look at the lesson of love and put it into practice. The earth plane is like a great school. The most important subject is love. A person can fail this subject. It makes me very sad.

SUSAN: Edan, how would you define love?

EDAN: Define love? People never understand. Love is life itself. People should allow it free expression through them. They should not work at attracting love, for it is everywhere. They must work at opening themselves to it. They must wash the windows and let the light come through. When a window is dirty, you do not go outside and bring into the house the sun, do you? With clean windows, the sun comes, does it not?

SUSAN: Is this what our "flower children" have in mind?

EDAN: What of the "flower children"? They feel this. They are busy searching for a way. The majority are running around with baskets, trying to capture the sunlight. They should allow the sun to come to them. It is everywhere and in everything. Simply tell it you want to be an instrument for it. Do not reject love from you.

SUSAN: Yes, Edan, we do find this difficult to understand.

EDAN: Accept. Do not explain. Analyzing love is to tear it apart. That is human love. Divine love cannot create problems. That is all.

There was a long pause. When no further questions were forthcoming, we said good night. The interview was over. Within two minutes Joe was awake. We played the tape back, and he listened to it quietly.

There was little of importance that we had to say to each other for the rest of the evening.

5. Witch Week at Roberts Flat

Harold Thomas, a Chicago witch, died a few years ago at the age of ninety-three. He came to America from Wales with his wife, also a witch, when they were barely out of their teens. He outlived his wife and children, and upon his death, no one was left to carry on his religious heritage.

A Philadelphia witch knew him and admired him for many years. Since, for professional reasons, he does not want to be identified here by his own name, he has chosen to adopt the name Harold Thomas as a tribute to an old friend. His wife, also a witch, has asked to be called Jane.

Harold and Jane were going to spend the weekend with me. Although I had visited them many times in Philadelphia, this was their first trip to New York. They had finally managed to get a reliable baby-sitter for their two kids. The Monday night before, I called Harold to tell him I was planning to meet them at Penn Station, and he said he'd let me know which train they'd be on Saturday morning. He wasn't sure then.

Tuesday afternoon, Joe Lukach arrived. He'd planned to be a houseguest for the whole week, at least. Joe knew Harold, but had never met Jane. Joe and I had a lot to do that week. First of all, his typewriter was still in storage and he wanted to borrow mine to type up some of the recipes for his cookbook. He'd just signed a contract and was anxious to get started.

We have plenty of room in my house. My twenty-two-year-old daughter, Susan, and I share a three-bedroom duplex in a brownstone building. We're not only geared for company, we love it.

Joe was carrying a small suitcase and a huge duffel bag

when he drove up in a taxi. Unpacking the suitcase and putting away his clothes was a simple matter taking only a few minutes. But the duffel bag?

Out of that came vials of oil—wintergreen, tuberose, gardenia, verbena, sandalwood, jasmine, peppermint and musk. Then there were jars of rosewater, orange water, anise sugar. And little packets of wheat seed, gold dust, silver dust, and iron filings. A cellophane-wrapped square of camphor. A cardboard carton of green putty. A brown paper bag of candles, two dozen of them—red, blue, white, purple, green, pink and black. These were not long tapers, styled and tinted for candelabra, but squat, seven inches tall, no-nonsense candles meant for the business of magic. And finally, a two-pound bag of beads in assorted colors, ready for stringing.

Joe had come prepared to mix up a batch of his favorite perfume, cast a few protective spells for his friends with problems and, in his spare time, string up some more bead necklaces.

I am perfectly willing to admit that, by this time, I found magic fascinating. I suspect everyone does, whether they believe in it or not. But I do think every housewife ought to know one of the basic facts of life when it comes to magic: It's messy.

We had no more finished lining up all Joe's assorted bottles and other paraphernalia on the mantelpiece in the dining room and found drawer space for the candles, when a knock on the door brought the news that for the next three days a new water main would be laid in the street and our water would be cut off from 10 to 4 while they were working.

That night, we drew a tub full of water and filled extra pots in the kitchen. Susan rushed out and bought bottled water for drinking and cooking. We were ready. Or so we thought.

Wednesday morning, we soon realized we hadn't braced ourselves for that steady rat-tat-tat drilling that nearly shook the house from its foundations. Nor for the fact that the workmen immediately sliced through the telephone cable. The phone was as dead as if we had ripped it from the wall.

Joe and I had already made a dinner engagement for that night. We had taken a subway uptown earlier in the day and at six o'clock were standing at a midtown corner, looking for a taxi. Neither of us had remembered that this was Earth Day in New York City and that several main traffic arteries had been closed to automobile traffic in order to observe the event.

Now, no one loves the earth and the purity of air more than a witch. But when it finally dawned on us that the traffic was worse than usual and that this official observance of Earth Day was to blame, Joe began to grumble about how stupid he thought it was to deliberately block already choked streets for any purpose, no matter how laudable.

"Then, how would you observe Earth Day, witch?" I asked.

"Well, I don't know. I haven't thought about it. Through witchcraft, I guess."

Right then and there, on the corner of Sixth Avenue and Fifty-seventh Street in Manhattan, while vainly searching for an empty cab, an idea was born. We fell to discussing the possibility of witches getting together to work out a ritual which could be used privately by any group as part of their efforts to effect broad and sweeping social reforms. Witches, as Joe conceded on the spot, aren't well organized enough to be effective on a large scale. But why couldn't they turn over some of their expertise to other groups who are?

At that point a taxi came along.

Naturally enough, we didn't discuss this—or any other phase of witchcraft—during the twenty-block ride. Instead, since we had already agreed to split the fare, Joe dug around until he found his dollar, and by the time we arrived at our destination, I had pocketed that and pulled out a five-dollar bill to hand the driver. The fare, plus tip, amounted to two dollars. I paid him and we got out, rang the bell and, when the buzzer sprung the door, went into the building and got on the elevator. I was still clutching the change—and vaguely realizing something was amiss.

When we got to the apartment and our hostess let us in,

I was still hanging onto the money. Suddenly, it dawned on me.

"Hey, Joe," I said. So far, I had barely said "Hello" to our hostess. "Look!" In my hand I held a five-dollar bill plus three ones.

We had short-changed the driver. I raced over to the window and looked out. Sure enough, the cab was still there. Grabbing the five-dollar bill, Joe headed back to the elevator to give it back. In a few minutes, he returned, laughing so hard he shook.

"When I got to the vestibule," he told us, calming down, "there was the driver peering in through the glass with a dazed look on his face. So, I opened the door and relief spread all over his kisser. Before I could hand him back the fiver, he said, 'Gee, mister. I'm glad I found you. Here!' And with that, he thrust *another* five at me. I told him 'No,' that there was a mix-up, but we owed *him*."

Joe chortled again. "See what taxiing a witch around New York can do to your brains?"

But the ride back home was another story.

We were about ten miles from my house. And we made the trip in ten minutes flat. Down the West Side Highway. Taking every curve on two wheels. Neither of us spoke. We couldn't. An occasional glance at Joe assured me that he was silently praying us home with everything he could think of. When we reached my neighborhood and started down those last few blocks of quiet, residential housing, we paused for a red light. The driver turned around and spoke for the first time.

"Say, buddy. See that stray cat over there? Sad, huh? Now let me tell you about nature. Them cats eat rats. They need water. Not milk. Water! You give them water?"

"Sure," I said weakly, speaking for both of us, "every night."

As we rounded the last corner to my house, the trench the water main people had sliced in the street was swarming with white-helmeted men. A New York Telephone Company truck was parked by its side. We paid the driver and fled upstairs.

Thursday morning the phone worked just fine. Thursday

afternoon, it died again. Rain began to fall. The trenches filled with water and mud. The drilling stopped.

"My God," Susan remarked at one point, "we're under siege."

And what of Harold and Jane? When were they due to arrive? Would we have a phone? Would we even have water? Except, of course, from the heavens; that seemed assured.

By Friday night, nothing had changed. The phone was dead. So was the plumbing. Only the heavens continued to pour out their largess. Finally, I put on a trench coat and trudged around to the corner drug store to try to call the Thomases.

For my initial dime, I got a recording telling me their line was out of order. Just before I burst into tears, a live operator cut in and dialed the number. It went through. And I found myself speaking to their thirteen-year-old daughter.

"Mamma and Papa are out, Susan," she told me at once. "Any message?"

"What train are they taking in the morning?" I asked.

"Gee, I don't know. Wait a minute." With that, she went off to fetch a train schedule and was was back on the line in seconds.

"I've never read one of these before," she confided at once. "Does ARR mean arrival?"

Now there's a game kid, with all the spunk and the courage of a football tackler. Her bright and unintimidated young mind sliced through all the asterisks and abbreviations and bold-face type and, a half hour and many dimes later, told me that only two trains arrived at Penn Station from Philadelphia in the morning. They were twenty minutes apart. I told her to tell her Mamma and Papa I'd be there to meet both.

And I was.

That Saturday turned out to be one of those bluebird days New York produces just when you are about to cut your throat. When that mood comes upon you, you don't consider moving away. After all, how could you call the movers?

If Harold and Jane thought I fell on their necks with an

unusual burst of fervor, they gave no sign. I know I babbled all the way home, and finally burst out, "Damn. Someone ought to curse the phone company."

Jane giggled. "Sounds as if someone already has."

As soon as we got home, the first thing Harold and Jane did was to shuck off their shoes. Then we settled down for a happy two days.

I asked her immediately if she wanted to do any sightseeing on her first trip to New York.

She seemed a little puzzled and then she smiled again and said, "Not particularly. Buildings are just buildings. Let's talk instead."

I was immensely relieved. That's what I wanted to do, too.

And we did.

Joe and Harold had already met, as I have said, and liked each other enormously. I had never had any qualms about Joe and Jane hitting it off. I had only been uptight because there had been so many unforeseen difficulties. The water was put back on. The telephone was not. Happily, I did not know then that it would be another month before it was.

That weekend, however, no one missed it.

While I wandered around in the kitchen getting food out for a sandwich lunch, the three witches sat in the dining room and plunged at once into the talk that interests them above all others: any and all phases of the occult.

Joe has always maintained that most people don't really understand the meaning of the word. He thinks of it as any knowledge that is "hidden." He said so.

Harold agreed at once. He said he finds explaining the occult world to others who have no innate understanding of the subject is very much like expecting a man who lives in the desert to give swimming lessons to someone who has never seen water.

"Takes an infinite faith in the existence of water," Jane added.

Joe laughed. "It does, indeed. But doesn't everyone have faith in the existence, if not the purity, of water? The trouble is, so many freaks and phonies have jumped in feet

first and muddied up the water for the rest of us. Take last Saturday. Susan and I went to a thing called the "First Festival of the Occult Arts," held here in New York at the Fillmore East. Now, I think the people who put that show on were wrong. Had they called it "Let's Make Occult Asses of Ourselves" I'd have no complaints. But as it stands, the whole thing—and it went on for hours—was utter trash for the most part. It was mostly a gimmick for some very bad—and very loud—rock music, and a deadly bore. Now if they'd wanted entertainment, they should have billed *my* favorite Swami as the major attraction."

Joe interrupted his story long enough to point out to Jane and Harold that there is a well-established Vedanta Center in New York and that he has the highest respect for their teachers and the work they do.

"But this Swami is one of the phonies," I yelled out from the kitchen.

Joe demurred. "Not exactly," he told them. "I think a phony is someone who deliberately sets out to defraud. I think this kook has really sold himself on the idea of His Holiness, as he now calls himself."

"A modest title," Jane commented.

"Brand-new, too," Joe went on. "Told me that a year ago he had a revelation. When he was forty. Seems that, overnight, he was completely reborn into a new body. Now, I'm not certain whether he's Jesus, Buddha or Mohammed. Maybe all three. Anyway, 'The Father,' as he tells it, informed him it was his mission to save the world. So now he is a Swami"—Joe snapped his fingers—"just like that. Of course, if he used his real name, along with the Swami title he dredged up, he'd probably be known as the world's first Swami Como-se-chiama, or something similar. At any rate, there's nothing imaginary about that platinum halo he wears. That's a 'gift' from Clairol."

Jane and Harold were both laughing. "And what," Jane asked, "had that old body been up to before the revelation?"

"Well," Joe answered, "gossip says he'd been a pretty well-known male whore around town. The Tarot, incidentally, agrees."

Jane sighed in mock resignation. "Just another case of

it's easier to move out than clean house," she said. "Right?"

"Right," Joe agreed. "You know, in New York, when I travel on the fringes of the occult circuit, in a good week I can run into at least twenty-three reincarnations of St. John the Baptist. Most of them, however"—and he wrinkled his nose—"seem to be afraid of the water."

By that time, I'd put out the lunch things. After we ate, Harold said he thought he'd take a nap. He went upstairs and stretched out on the bed in the front bedroom.

Joe and Jane and I lazed around downstairs in the living room, drinking coffee. I told Jane then about how utterly helpless I had felt about not being able to call them and confirm our meeting that morning. She told me they had been to a meeting and hadn't gotten home until after 2 A.M., which, coupled with a long hard day Harold had at the office, was why he needed a nap.

"But then, we weren't too concerned about not hearing from you," she added casually. "We'd tried to call before we left the house, but the phone just rang. No one cut into the line to say the phone was out of order. Harold and I concentrated on it for a while and neither of us received any negative vibrations from you or Joe that would indicate anything wrong. So we knew that any trouble was purely mechanical, went on to our meeting, and got your message when we got home."

Then Jane asked me how the book was going. I told her I was in the midst of the first draft but still had to fit together all my research about actual coven practices throughout the country. I couldn't resist telling her that one of the things that bugged me were the well-meant suggestions I sometimes received from friends who were far removed from the witch world. One had suggested that he thought I ought to describe the behavior of my witch friends when they didn't know I was around. "Did you ever see one do witchy things when they didn't know you're looking?" he had asked me in all seriousness. I repeated that to her.

Jane whooped.

"Hey!" she said. "Now's your chance. Tip-toe upstairs and spy on Harold! You're about to catch a witch snoring."

She was right. I did.

While Harold sawed happily away, Jane and Joe and I sat around and talked about witch children and the children of witches. There is a difference between the two. Joe, a witch child, was fortunately born into a family that understood magic and the craft. Jane did not develop into a witch until she was twenty-one. Now, as the mother of two children, she wanted to hear about his early years. So we chatted of Jennie, his mother, and Blanquita, the Dominican priestess who had guided him. I could join into this conversation; I knew them all.

I had also met Jane and Harold's children, but I had no idea whether or not either of them were born to the faith of their parents. As it turned out, neither were Jane or Harold.

"Then how do you handle religious problems with the kids?" I asked. "For instance, does Betty [the girl who handled our phone conversation so well] realize you are a witch?"

Jane tucked her feet up on the couch, lit a cigarette and thought about that question for a second or two.

"Let's not take it off the top like that. She's thirteen. Then there's the baby, Mark, who is only four. They're in different stages of development. Now—for Betty, yes, she knows. Does she understand? No. Not really. And we try not to burden her with the responsibility of accepting *any* beliefs which are beyond her capacity to understand. She knows, of course, that her mother and father go places and do things that other mothers and fathers don't.

Jane tapped out the cigarette.

"What have you told her?" I asked.

"I don't think Harold and I have *told* her—or Mark—anything. I think we have tried to teach them to keep their mouths shut."

"About witchcraft?"

"Not only that. We have taught them that a family is a unity. That one member of a family does not run around blabbing all the family business to anyone who will listen."

"How about the baby?"

"Well, now. Here we go again. Harold and I are seeing more people, being more active, bringing more and more people, particularly young ones, into the craft than we were

when Betty was four years old. While we work very, very slowly in that direction, Mark has grown up all his life hearing the word 'witch' used as casually as my mother used to hear the word 'washerwoman.' So now, whenever he wants a special treat and I don't think he should have it, he stamps his foot and says, 'I wish you were a *good* witch!' Then, of course, when he gets into a sandpile battle with the kid next door and storms in, flinging himself in my arms in a storm of tears, he'll sob, 'But, Mom, if you were a *bad* witch, you'd kill him.'"

Joe joined in at this point.

"Reminds me of the experience Valerie had." He was referring to a member of his own coven who is also the mother of two. Last year, he told us, when her oldest girl was seven, her teacher was reading a fairy story to the class. Witches were the main characters. As usual, when the story hour was over, the teacher asked for questions. Whereupon Valerie's child, holding up her hand for her turn, announced very demurely but proudly when she was called upon to speak, "My mother is a witch. And my Uncle Joe is a witch." The teacher beamed at the child and murmured, "Sure, honey," and passed on to the next child with scarcely a pause for breath.

He feels, however, that Valerie's younger child *was* born to witchcraft. Joe said the child has always been an alert, happy youngster, but with a strong streak of secretiveness. He's six years old now and, says Joe, "Valerie doesn't have to warn him not to discuss witchcraft outside the family. He just naturally doesn't. But he is already tuned in to the occult, by nature. I remember once, when he was only about two years old—and already talking fairly well—the three of us were out driving around. We passed a cemetery and this little baby turned to his mother and said, 'Look at all the people, Mamma.' Gave us both quite a turn. Took me right back to my own childhood."

I turned again to Jane.

"Let's get back to Betty. Does she go to any church or Sunday School? Like her friends do, if they do?"

"Oh, sure," Jane said. "Right now she is going to the local Episcopal Sunday School. As a matter of fact, Betty was baptized when she was a small child. Harold and I

didn't have it done. It just so happened that I was visiting my parents and they made all the arrangements. We had no objections. It's easier to go along than to tell the truth. My parents have no idea either of us are witches. Why hurt them? Right now, Betty is really interested in all the church programs for young people. Certainly we do nothing to discourage her. If she wants to continue to follow that faith when she grows up, it's perfectly all right with us. Witches are born, not made. All of us aren't born like Joe, of course. But those of us who do develop in later years *are* born with a latent leaning toward the craft. Neither Harold nor I see that in Betty. We may be wrong, of course. Witch parents, just like any other parents, are often too close to their own children to see them objectively."

"What about Mark?" I asked.

"We don't know. We've never had him baptized. But something rather interesting came up on that score recently. He's started in a private nursery school, and when we entered him, the question came up, as it always does, about the family religious affiliation. Confronted by forms, Harold and I usually just write 'none.' We did on those. As for baptizing Mark, one day I happened to meet a minister of one of the local Protestant churches at a PTA meeting held in connection with the nursery school. We chattered aimlessly away and he finally asked about Mark's baptism. I told him, just as casually, that we hadn't gotten around to it yet. Now here was a very bright young man, chipper and assured. He just patted me on the shoulder and suggested we drop around with Mark for the ceremony. 'After all,' he said, 'it's just a formality, you know. Only for the record. Nothing magic about it.' I smiled right back, from the teeth out, and said I'd think about it. Now really, Susan! *All* religious rituals are based on magic. If they aren't, then they have no value whatsoever. If we ever do decide to have Mark baptized 'for the record' you can be absolutely certain it will be done by someone with a respect for the spiritual significance of the act. That little social scene with the minister was just another indication to me that the Christian Church got out of the business of religion a long time ago."

Just then Harold came down the stairs, stretching and yawning.

"What are you gabbing about now, grumpy," he greeted Jane with a sleepy smile.

"Talking about the kids. And religion. And not having Mark baptized."

He shrugged, walked over and sat down beside her on the couch.

"Ah, the Church surrendered to the forces of Freud a long time ago," he stated flatly, fully awake now.

"What do you mean by that?" I asked, somewhat stupidly. I had realized long ago that witches seem to have a natural built-in immunity against all psychiatric influence, but I was still somewhat taken aback by his mentioning the name 'Freud.'

"Oh, I've never made a serious study of his work," Harold admitted at once. "Frankly, it always bored me. Why wouldn't it? He tried to replace the Goddess, and that," he added facetiously, "is a hard act to follow."

"I think you can see the results of that sellout all around you," he added. "Personally, I never could understand how anyone can be expected to grow, mature, adjust—use whatever term you wish or lump 'em all together—when they are required to evaluate and reconcile all their own virtues and shortcomings within the limits of a socially acceptable norm. That's analysis. It's a science? An art? Certainly, it's limiting. Does it lead you to understand your innermost self? Or just to accept the role you are expected to play? The human soul just won't cramp. When it does, then you get a human being whose whole soul is in pain. All its creative energies are directed inward—not outward."

Joe joined Harold in this.

"And you also get the phenomena of what are now being called our 'shifting roles.' Sure, they are shifting around all right. But you must remember that, in the sociological sense, they are only shifting around in a narrow space. They are nailed fast inside a spiritual crate.

"We forget the metaphysical lesson: that the woman's role is of the highest spiritual significance. In this Universe, it is the role of the mother to sensitize the child. It

is up to the father to provide the magnetism necessary for the child to learn to deal with the material level. The child has no other way to learn how to deal with either force during the first years of life."

"Psychologists call that mother role 'nurturing,'" I pointed out.

"Yes, I know," Joe said. "But nurturing, unfortunately—thanks to the Freudian sellout as Harold calls it—often comes down to meaning whether or not a woman should breast-feed her baby, and the laying on of guilt if this is not possible. Food is love, no matter how it is presented. So are smiles and kisses and hugs and all the rest," he said. "The psychiatric view can lead to this—hell, it *has* led to this," he went on. "Women are now rejecting the mother role nature meant for them to play because they have been repeatedly told by the authorities who have sprung from that line of reasoning that they are not 'fulfilling' themselves as individuals. That they are not being recognized as human beings. That they must fight to—"

"Fulfill their inner needs?" Jane popped that one out, laughing.

I turned to her and, without thinking how the words sounded, asked, "Jane, did you ever work?"

She laughed, and before I could rephrase the question, said, "D'you mean have I ever earned a living?" We both laughed.

"Check. Have you ever drawn a paycheck?"

"Yes. I have. Usually part time, when Betty was in school and before Mark was born. Now, if you mean have I ever longed for a career, then the answer is—I have one. At home. Underneath all our scraps—and we do have them—I like living with Harold. I like being a mother. I like being a wife. After all, I've been at the last job for twenty years."

"Think it will last?" I asked, kidding.

"Dunno," Harold answered pleasantly. "By witch standards, we've really only met." They exchanged grins.

Jane turned back to me, smiling impishly. "Now once a month, regularly, I feel the urge for liberation," she said. Then she dropped her head into cupped hands in imitation of total despair.

"Once a month I see it all so clearly," she moaned. "The scales fall from my eyes. What a fool I've been! I am a nothing. I am not fulfilled. I am tied down. I'm only a machine. A convenience." Then she looked up, eyes sparkling with mischief.

"Sure. I get mad once in a while. And not just once a month, either. At times when that mood is upon me, I've been known to grab Mark and push him outside and yell, 'Go get dirty like the rest of the kids on the block so Mamma can wash and iron.' Anger, frustration—they can tear you down. We all have them. No matter how we live. So I turn mine to constructive use and tackle the ironing, which I despise.

"Look, Susan, I know you have a problem trying to picture me to your readers because you can't use my real name, so you're afraid to say anything which will give anyone proof of my real identity. Well, here's the way I see myself: I'm an ordinary, nondescript, brunette housewife, going gray. At thirty-seven, I'm at that age when I'm figuring on getting an older obstetrician. The one I have now now longer says, 'Look here, young lady, . . .' but says, 'Well, you know, at your age. . . .' I'm the sort of woman who, in her heart, sometimes wants to put the kids out at night and sing lullabies to the cats. But, because I am a witch, I have to watch that temper of mine. It could affect my work in magic."

"How do you handle it—when you're not ironing?" I asked.

"Well, remember that I can fling out a little curse when I get mad without even stopping to think, through mental magic. So, I've asked the Goddess to grant me a period of grace. I want a five-minute lapse before any one of my instinctive little nasties can take effect."

"And you get this?"

"Yes. Thank the Gods. But I'm still working on learning how to curb my temper. It's one of the lessons I have to master in this life."

"How did you like working?" I asked, drawing her back to that subject.

"Oh, that," she said. "Now that was *my* revelation, and darned if I see how women are so taken up—or, rather,

taken in—by it. Now, I'm not talking about those unique women who really and honestly do have a career or a vocation. Women who go that route do so because that is what they are meant to do and because, in their hearts and souls, they know this is where their destiny lies. If the Goddess has meant them to be truly extraordinary, they can even combine a profession with motherhood and be marvelously successful at both.

"But for the vast majority of us, a job is really a very tiresome way to pass the time. Sometimes it's necessary to work because you need the money in order to live. All right. Fair enough. But to call it fulfillment? Crap!

"In an office, it works like this: She's a secretary. He's a boss. He mixes up the mail. She straightens it out. He pulls papers out of the file. She puts them back. She answers the phone. He refuses to talk to at least half the people who call, so she makes appointments with other secretaries. In a really productive week, these two girls can set up a telephone conversation between two grown men."

Harold was nodding agreement as Jane spoke of working.

"I'm a junior-grade boss," he added. "A civil engineer. Fortunately, I'm in the field most of the time. But I do see things happen that way in my office. I think there are very good reasons for the 'look busy' work that goes on. I think it works like this.

"First of all, I can only tell you about engineering. The average engineering job, what a young man who has graduated with a professional degree is actually assigned to do when he starts out, could be performed very adequately by a grammar school graduate with a little on-job training. But the Degree is there. So, the young man has to have his level. And that means a title and a salary to justify the formal education. And, of course, a secretary.

"Now, in order to support such a structure, women have had to be drawn into the labor market. Cheap labor, to put it bluntly. But before they could be enticed there, it had to be made socially acceptable for them to work in the first place. Today, in order to keep women in the market, they have to be led to believe they are fulfilling themselves. Look, women aren't stupid. They've caught on to this cycle.

Sure, they're mad. They should be. There is built-in dissatisfaction and frustration in the system.

"Only the other day, I was talking about this with a Negro co-worker of mine. As a matter of fact, he ranks me in the organizational setup in my shop. Now, surely it hasn't escaped anyone's attention that all our minority groups are caught up in the status sacrament, too? Anyway, this very sharp character put on his best exaggerated Uncle Tom drawl and said"—Harold cleared his throat, deepened his voice and attempted an imitation—"Mistuh Harold, looks like folks today is plantin' more cotton so's they can buy more slaves to plant more cotton to buy more slaves to plant . . ."—his voice dwindled away.

"Your friend gets the point," Joe commented with a smile. "It's the same old treadmill story. We think we're advancing as long as we're changing. Not me. And not my witches. Earthly life is too short; eternal life too long. We opt for the eternal view. We're all out for that 'upward mobility' we hear so much about today. But spiritually, not materially."

"We are, too," the Thomases chorused. Harold went on to say that it was his personal observation that if a witch decides his mission in life is to clean up after others, then he usually sets out to be the best garbage collector in town and spends the rest of his time enjoying life.

"That's another thing," Jane said. "Too many people *don't* enjoy life. They try to stay out of it as long as possible. Their real problem is that they don't really hate their mother or father. They don't really care about their reactions when they were put on the potty for the first time. They don't even hate the only job they are qualified to do, whatever that may be. What they really hate is the earth itself. And, what they fail to see is that everyone—and everything—on this earth has an intrinsic value. Or it wouldn't be here. Including themselves."

Harold broke in. "They also forget that every single thing on this earth that has existed since time began is still here. Forms change, but ever since man has lived on this planet, he has not succeeded in 'ridding the earth' of anything at all—except for the few pieces of trash he managed to deposit on the moon."

Jane nodded soberly. "To me, in the final analysis, people aren't really afraid to die. They're just afraid to live."

"I've seen death and he appeared to me to be a gentle and loving monomaniac," Harold said.

"When was that?" I asked.

"Once, when I was doing an engineering job in a hospital," he said. "I had just walked past a doorway where a very old and very sick man was hooked up to life by all sorts of tubes and machinery. I know I paused and thought, 'What a pity,' when suddenly, this figure materialized in front of me. I recognized immediately that I was seeing death. And he was no 'warrior.' "

"What did you do?" I asked. I'll confess to a slight case of the shudders at Harold's matter-of-fact recital. Jane and Joe both joined Harold in reassuring me, once again, that witches who are highly tuned psychically often see apparitions or pick up thought vibrations from others and that, through long training, have learned to tolerate the experience without showing any outward sign that anything unusual has occurred.

While I am not exactly the timid type myself, I wouldn't guarantee not to fall into a dead faint at the sight of the apparition of death. I said so.

Joe reminded me that my reaction was perfectly normal and that is why he found Valerie's two-year-old child's comment about "seeing all the people" in the cemetery so remarkable.

"What did I do?" Harold went back to my original question. "I didn't *do* anything. I know that anyone else who might have seen me at that moment only saw a building engineer stop briefly as if he might have lost his way in the corridor and couldn't make up his mind which turn to take. Actually, this witch was talking to that apparition. Not aloud, you understand—it's a mind communication. He told me that he could come now, or return later. He wasn't asking me for *my* opinion. He was merely reassuring me that he was not, as I've already said, a warrior who must claim a victim. He then told me that he was coming back to carry the soul of the old man away when the light of day faded. And, at six o'clock, when I was through for the day, I made it a point to return to that wing of the building. The old man was gone."

"We do call death by such unpleasant names," Jane said. "Like the Dark Angel."

"How's about the Grim Reaper?" Joe responded.

I threw out my next question to all three.

"Then witches aren't afraid of death?"

Joe answered first. "I don't know any who are. As for myself, no. I'm not afraid of death. But I don't want to give up my life too cheaply—that I am afraid of and therefore I do everything I can to protect myself. For instance, I don't want to be murdered by some junkie on the street some midnight. That might even turn out to be my destiny, but I still don't want it."

Jane agreed about not fearing death. "But I have my own fear, too," she said. "Personally, I don't want to give up my life too soon. I just don't want to go home until the party's over, and I feel I just got here and am starting to have fun. Now I want to help other guests have a good time, too."

"So do I, for that matter," Harold joined in. "And part of the fun Jane and I have figured out is how we can best work with young kids. Not necessarily to lead them into witchcraft, you understand. As Joe knows, witches don't proselytize. We know a lot of young people will become witches. We want to help them. But we also want to restore the joy of living to as many as we can. And we have another objective, too. This is not confined to our own group. It's spread throughout all the other groups we are close to. We love life. We don't fear death. But we now—for the first time in our history—fear for the death of the earth."

Jane was listening intently. Now she said, "The earth is a playground the gods meant us to enjoy while we learned, just like little children go from splashing in the wading pool to mastering high dives. But now we have water pollution—air pollution—and a population growing out of control."

I pointed out that witches had never expressed political or social reform, and they all agreed this was true.

"We do take an eternal view," Joe said. "One political regime follows another; one war is replaced by another—all are part of the very slow evolution of the earth. But this is a different matter."

"We worship nature," Jane said, agreeing with Joe. "Now for the first time we are systematically destroying her. This is an insult to our gods. And now I am beginning to feel the same way about the population explosion. Now mind this well: We follow a religion of fertility. But by fertility we mean the fertility of plants, of animals and, yes, people, when the need arises. But we are opposed to the mindless reproduction of our species when it threatens to throw the balance of nature out of kilter."

Joe and I exchanged glances. We were both suddenly back on the corner of Sixth Avenue and Fifty-seventh Street in Manhattan, helplessly caught in a traffic jam—the result of Earth Day.

We hadn't discussed it since. After all, we'd been vainly struggling to overcome the more immediate crises that the failure of the telephone and plumbing had brought to our daily lives that week.

We now told Harold and Jane about our Earth Day experience in New York. They were intrigued by the idea of writing up a ritual other groups who want to work for the purification of the earth could follow. "A very private, personal—and powerful—demonstration," they immediately termed it. With that in mind, the three witches spent the rest of the weekend drawing up such a ritual.

They not only pooled their own knowledge, but also went on, after that weekend, to check out this ritual with other groups until everyone was satisfied that it represented one which could be universally—and safely—used by anyone.

To those who want to take advantage of witchlore, I have a few pointers which were offered conversationally, but not incorporated into the ritual itself.

First of all, any large group who wishes to experiment should break themselves down into subgroups of thirteen people. No more. Whenever possible (but not necessary), the ideal is to assign six men and six women to each subgroup. The thirteenth may be of either sex.

It does not matter where these groups meet, as long as they do so privately. What is important, however, is that *all* subgroups perform the ritual at exactly the same hour for maximum results.

Organizational grouping problems out of the way, it is then necessary for each subgroup to choose, before the ritual, the woman who is going to act the part of the priestess. Ideally, she should be the one from the group who knows the most about witchcraft or any phase of occultism. She, in turn, will choose one of the members of the group to serve as her priest. These roles may be reversed with no loss of power.

The ritual should be scheduled for the night of the full moon.

Now come the stage directions. These are the props which should be set up before the ritual begins.

A nine-foot circle is marked on the floor. This can be done with chalk, string, or may even be outlined by household items, like pots and pans. Witches, in the old days of their persecution, used to use the latter method, or so I am told, for the simple reason they could either remove them quickly or kick them into the general disorder of a household whenever a knock at the door alerted them to the presence of a witch-hunter. This precaution hardly seems necessary today.

After the circle is drawn, an altar, approximately two feet square is set up in the center. A female image, representing the Goddess, is placed in the middle of the altar. This can be either a picture or a statue. A censer is placed in front of her. Don't forget to put incense in it. Sandalwood is always a good choice. A symbol of air is placed to the east of the Goddess (a picture of a sword will do). A symbol of fire is placed to the south (a branch or twig will serve). A symbol of water is placed to the west (an empty cup is fine). A symbol of earth is set to the north (a five-pointed star, or a drawing of one, will do).

Then, five white candles are set upon the altar, lined up behind the image of the Goddess. A wand is placed flat down before her, in front of the censer. This wand is, by tradition, a black-pointed willow stick. Any pointer will serve the purpose here. A broom is leaned against the south

of the altar. A double-headed axe, or the facsimile of one, is hung upright, to the north of the altar, outside the circle.

The scene is now set for the ritual.

The people who are to participate in it must be, as the witches say, "cleansed in body and soul." They mean that everyone should have bathed and dressed in clean clothes. They also mean no drinking. No grass-smoking.

As the group assembles, music and singing is in order. The more the better. However, in this instance, all music should be about love and joy and the magic of living. No blues, unless it's upbeat, all the way.

When everyone has gathered, and the time agreed upon has come, all members assemble inside the circle. The ritual begins.

In silence, the priestess, standing to the right of the altar, motions to the priest to light the candles and incense. She then motions to everyone to sit down within the circle. When all are settled and quiet, she says:

The presence of the noble Goddess
Extends everywhere
Throughout the many strange, magical
And beautiful worlds
To all places of wilderness, enchantment and freedom.

The priest hands her a lighted candle and she places it at the north of the circle, on the inside edge and, looking outward, says with all repeating after her:

The Lady is awesome
The powers of death do bow before her.

She places a candle at the east and, again looking outward, with all repeating after her, says:

Our Goddess is a Lady of joy
The winds are her servants.

She places a candle to the south in the same manner, and says:

Our Lady is a Goddess of Love
At her blessing and desire
Does the sun bring forth life anew.

She places a candle to the west in the same manner, and says:

The seas are the domain
Of our Serene Lady
The mysteries of the depths
Are hers alone.

Then she sits down. The priest takes the wand and, starting at the north, draws it along the entire circle clockwise back to the north point. He then says:

The circle is sealed
And all herein are totally and completely
Apart from the outside world
That we may glorify the Lady
Whom we adore. Blessed Be!

All respond:

Blessed Be!

He stands for a moment with the wand held out in salute toward the double-headed axe (labrys symbol). He gives the wand to the priestess. She motions for all to stand, and they repeat after her while she holds the wand out in salute. She says:

As above, so also below
As the Universe, so also the soul
As without, so also within
Blessed and gracious One
On this day we consecrate to thee:
Our bodies, our minds and our spirits for the purpose of cleansing this earth upon which we live, the air that we breathe and the waters that are so much a part of our existence. Let peace and harmony replace

war and turmoil and restore to us our equilibrium on this earth plane.

And now each member can, if they choose, offer an individual creative contribution—singing, dancing, poetry reading. All, however, should be in praise of the Goddess and the beauty of the earth—not in condemnation of the forces which disrupt the Universal plan. All are conducted within the circle.

To close the ritual, the priestess, standing, says:

Our rite draws to its end
O lovely and gracious Goddess of the Moon
Be with each of us as we depart.

She taps with the wand, and extinguishes each candle, beginning with the north. When all have been put out, she then says:

The circle is broken
In joy we meet—with joy we part.

Everyone responds:

In joy we meet—with joy we part.

Break out the wine.

And, speaking of rituals, remember the Philadelphia couple I mentioned at the beginning of this book? The pair who used magic against a California woman was, of course, Harold and Jane. She used candle magic; he used image magic. They coordinated their efforts in a homemade remedy of their own. The woman, they told me, had swiped one of their written-out rituals when she had been a guest in their home. Then she peddled copies of it on the West Coast until she raised enough money to buy a very elaborate combination stereo-television console.

"What happened?" I asked them before they left for home.

"We zonked her," Jane said happily.

"Sure did," Harold agreed. "Not two weeks later, we heard from some of our West Coast friends that when all that beautiful machinery arrived and she plugged it in—Zap! It short-circuited. Burned out every wire. Right down to the chassis. A total loss."

"No insurance?" I asked.

"No," he said cheerily. "And the warranty had expired. She'd bought it from a private party, not a dealer."

Then we were caught up in leave-taking confusion. Joe had decided to leave, too, and go uptown to see Jennie, his mother. My daughter, Susan, agreed to usher everyone to the right subway stops while I stayed home.

As they were trooping down the stairs, Jane looked back up and called, "Hey, don't forget to send Joe Wilson our love when you write him."

6. Flags, Flax and Fodder

Since covens operate autonomously, how have witches structured the underground which links them together?

Joseph Bernard Wilson, spokesman for the Topeka, Kansas, coven has been a major architect. He is the publisher of a witch newsletter, *The Waxing Moon.* He has been bringing out this mimeographed paper since 1965 to serve as a clearing house of information for the Craft in America. It is the only one of its kind in the country, and he patterned it after *The Pentagram,* published in England.

Until the debut of *The Waxing Moon,* an unorganized and sluggish underground existed. Joe was the first witch to tell me that one can always zero in on another through their psychic antennae they call "vibrations."

Harold carried this concept one step further by telling me it is even possible for a witch to pick up vibrations from an entire community and ascertain whether or not witchcraft is being actively practiced anywhere in the vicinity. Five years ago, American witches relied on this feeler system entirely. It had, of course, a very limited radius, and contact from one coven to another traveled a slow and circuitous route. Joseph Wilson was the first who tried to change all that.

Through his publication, Joseph tells me he is in fairly regular touch with a hard core of some 250 witches in every state in the Union, although he cannot, of course, keep up a steady drumbeat of correspondence with them.

In a way, he uses *The Waxing Moon* for that job. He puts out this four- to six-page newsletter four times a year, on what he calls the cross-quarter days. This is another term for the four Sabbats observed by witches—

Hallow Eve (Halloween) for the fall, February Eve (Candlemas) for the winter, May Eve (Belthane) for the spring and August Eve (Lammas) for the summer.

This is not a business enterprise. He does not accept subscriptions. Although each issue varies in content, he always tries to review occult books of interest to craft members, include a brief article written by another member on the philosophy of witchcraft, and list about a dozen names and addresses of people who would like to "correspond with others interested in the Old Religion." These are run as personal notices.

Such ads serve a definite purpose. Some witches take turns listing their names and addresses and accept the responsibility for answering all letters and screening all inquiries regarding information about the craft. While witches say they do not seek converts, on the other hand they do not, as Joseph pointed out, feel they should shut off all avenues of approach.

Occasionally, he advertises *The Waxing Moon* in *Fate,* a digest-sized monthly pulp magazine that has been sold on the newsstands or available by subscription for about twenty years. *Fate* is given over in its entirety to articles and stories about the occult.

Joseph has determined that each succeeding advertisement brings a sharp jump in requests for copies of *The Waxing Moon.* At such times, his mailings can easily triple.

I learned those facts later. When I first spied his ad in *Fate* I sent for a copy. After I received it, I wrote to him, and gradually we entered into what proved to be a long correspondence. I made it clear from the beginning that I planned to write a book about witchcraft.

Most witches sign their letters "Blessed Be."

Always, Joseph's letters carried the sign-off "Flags, Flax and Fodder." To me, this was the first of many lessons that witches can be a highly individual lot while still sharing the same basic traditions and practices. Over and over again, I was to discover that, in America at least, there is no "one way" of doing things in witchcraft.

My curiosity having been piqued by the expression, I asked what it meant. By return mail Joseph wrote:

"Flags are a form of rush, a plant that grows in European waters. Flags equal water. Flax, being the weaver's plant, and blue besides, represents the Goddess of Birth and Death (Fate), the principle of air. Fodder, which means grass, equals the earth. Thus the expression 'Flags, Flax and Fodder' means 'I bless you by water, by air and by earth,' the three elements which belong to the Goddess."

Much to my surprise, I learned that Joseph is a staff sergeant in the Air Force, a career man with special training in Public Relations. His service records list him as a Druid—the ancient and almost legendary British cult who reputedly built Stonehenge.

Our correspondence grew more intriguing by the week and increased in bulk until it reached the point where letters merely spawned other questions and answers without any central resolutions. When he wrote that he was to be in Indianapolis to attend a special training course in Public Relations at Fort Benjamin Harrison, I flew out to meet him personally over a long weekend.

By that time, I already knew from first-hand experience with Joe Lukach that witches love gaudy colors. Many of them, however, find black pleasing to wear. Witches rarely wear hats. Head coverings tend to interfere with the vibrations they receive from others. They like hair. They deplore the unkempt hair styles hippies adopt, for it offends their deep feeling for cleanliness. But they will grow a thick head of hair, if possible, keep it neatly trimmed, and leave the crew cuts to others. Aside from these flimsy clues, as I have said before, you can't—or I can't—tell a witch by his appearance.

Joseph Wilson knocked at the door of my hotel room at the appointed time. As I went to answer, I couldn't help wondering, How will *this* one look?

When I opened the door, there stood Joseph Bernard Wilson, lean and lithe, wearing tight black jeans and a black turtle neck pullover and carrying a black dispatch case. His dark brown mustache was small and carefully groomed—and his head was completely shaved.

Witches are, I reminded myself, an improvising bunch.

Joseph confirmed this almost immediately when, with a broad grin that set his amber eyes dancing, he announced

that his deliberate baldness was merely his witch's version of conformity. He did, he assured me, adhere strictly to Air Force regulations in manner and dress. He did not, even on his own time, wear colorful sport clothes that might seem unconventional. Since closely cropped hair is required by the Air Force, he simply shaved his off. As a witch, he was perfectly content with both solutions. He found black, top to bottom, as soothing to his own vibrations as brilliant color. And he found no hair at all was just as satisfactory as a well-kept thatch for the same reason. He looked like a younger version of Yul Brynner—with glasses.

Why is he a witch?

With that opening question, we settled down to talk for hours about his early years and the path that was to lead him to the Craft.

There are several striking similarities between the childhood experiences of Joe Lukach, who was born in New York City to a family attuned to witchcraft, and Joseph Wilson, born in a small community to parents who had quite possibly never heard of the Old Religion.

Neither grew up in a "broken home"; both are eldest sons; both have a brother and a sister. But what seems more significant to me, both were "loners" from earliest memory.

Joseph Wilson was born December 11, 1942, at 11:35 A.M. at St. Johns, Michigan, a town about eighteen miles north of Lansing. This makes him a Sagittarian, not a Piscean, like Joe Lukach.

In my search for parallels, no matter how flimsy, between the life patterns of witches, I attempted to find a correlation between astrological signs and a predeliction toward witchcraft. This was a blind alley. They are divided almost equally among all twelve signs.

Joseph told me that his mother, Marian, and his father, Richard, are both still living and that his brother is now eighteen and his sister fourteen.

"Do they know you are a witch, Joseph?" I interrupted him.

"Yep. It doesn't seem to bother them. Actually, they don't mention it."

Joseph's own first memory is about a nightmare that occurred periodically. While nightmares are always frightening, to Joseph this one had certain psychic overtones that never left him.

When Joseph was about two years old, his dream—or nightmare—was about sharks. Unusual? Only in that, at that age, the only water which was familiar to him was the water which came out of a tap. He insisted that since they lived inland, he had never seen nor heard of a lake or a pond or a body of water as such. Not at that age.

"Yet, I dreamed about sharks," he repeated. "I didn't even know how to explain my dreams to anyone. And even now the dream is vivid. Of course, now I can identify a shark. Looks just like what I saw then. The only difference is now I know what it is."

What about school? Joseph, too, went to kindergarten.

"I don't remember how I felt," he said. "But I can tell you this. The very first day, I wet my pants."

With that, Joseph's eyes began to gleam with suppressed laughter. "I guess," he added, "you might say that summed up my entire attitude toward an education."

He went on to explain that once he had learned to read and write with facility, the rest of his school life was one long, deadly bore.

"Very early I got the impression—'this is something I don't have to do.' Very early, I felt that I already knew what they were trying to teach me. Very early I felt like my teachers were trying to warp me into being something *they* wanted me to be and not what *I* wanted to be."

"Did you have any friends? Any one to talk with?"

"Yep. I had a little friend. And someone I talked with all the time. His name was Dang."

"Dang?"

"He was my little playmate. I saw him. I heard him. No one else did. My mother insisted he didn't exist. But I knew better."

"How long did this friendship last?"

"Oh. About six years. Long after I started school."

"Did you learn not to talk to him in front of other people?"

"I sure did."

Joseph went on to say that he did some things which weren't always just right with Dang, too. He recalled the time when he played a game in which he was a gas station attendant.

"I took a Coke bottle and filled it with water and decided that my father's car needed gas. . . ."

"And?"

"They didn't accept my explanation that 'Dang did it.' They were right, of course. They still tease me about it."

Joseph says that their friendship was more than such childhood mischief, however.

"He used to talk with me," he said. "I think that I learned a lot from Dang, although, quite honestly, I cannot say specifically what. I can say that every time I needed help with something, I'd ask Dang and he'd always help me. He was always right."

We were silent for a moment or two. Then I asked, "Joseph, do you think today, now that you have developed your own psychic powers, that Dang was just a figment of your imagination?"

Joseph shrugged. "I know what you're driving at. Lots of kids have make-believe playmates, right?"

"Right. So what makes Dang different?"

"Well, first of all, I believe that a lot of these so-called playmates—not all of them by a long shot, but some of them—that kids chatter on and on about *are* spirits. As far as Dang is concerned, he was around to help me and guide me—not just to play games."

His conviction on this point led us into a discussion of his early impressions—or lack of them—about religion. He makes no claim that Dang's "friendship" pointed the way to witchcraft.

"Religion—conventional religion—was always a blank page to me," he explained.

"By the time I was nine, I felt myself to be a deeply religious person—and I know I talked with Dang about that—with a lot of puzzlement on my part. I simply could not understand why people had stopped worshiping the old gods and goddesses. You see, I loved to read and devoured everything I could get my hands on in mythology.

Those gods and goddesses of nature were very real to me—as real as Dang—and I instinctively started burning incense to them."

He described the next five years of his life as a period in which he was very withdrawn.

"And what about your peers?" I asked. "Did you miss those friendships?"

"Sometimes. Not often. I enjoyed myself, actually. We lived in an isolated part of the country. I used to go for long walks in the woods. And I was never alone there. There was always 'something' along with me that I felt."

Joseph said that his love for the woods pleased his father. But his father had always wanted to get him interested in hunting and assumed that was the reason the forest fascinated him. But Joseph denies this.

"I used to go out with the gun my father gave me and just sit under a tree, relax and smoke stolen cigarettes. It wasn't that shooting an animal was all that bad. I just felt it wouldn't be a good idea for *me* to kill anything. After all, I wasn't hungry. Sure, it's okay to go hunting if you must kill something for food. But other than that—no."

Somehow or other, Joseph Wilson got through school.

"Looking back," he said, "I guess the roughest part was high school. I still had absolutely no one to talk to and, by this time, Dang had disappeared. So, I switched around, trying other religions, so to speak. I've already told you that nothing satisfied me, except what I had started learning for myself about the age of nine. I was still enamored of the old gods and goddesses. Then I joined the Baptist Church."

"Why? Of all the things to do, why that?" I asked.

"I was looking for a girl," he said. Now he was laughing.

"Well, at least you weren't that withdrawn!"

"Nope. And I met her. Daisy. We were married as soon as I was graduated from high school. By a Justice of the Peace. I was eighteen. I joined the Air Force and as soon as I finished basic training, Daisy joined me and we've been together ever since."

During Joseph's first hitch in the Air Force, he was assigned to the McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita,

Kansas, a move which was to lead him to witchcraft.

It began when he joined a Little Theater group and won the role of Nicky in *Bell, Book and Candle*. This play about modern witchcraft, played for laughs, was made into a movie starring Kim Novak and James Stewart when Joseph was only sixteen years old. In 1958, *Look* magazine reported on the filming of the sex and hex comedy: "The late John van Druten, who wrote the play on which the movie is based, admitted that the play rose from 'a mysterious impulse that started me writing.' Even the title came suddenly to mind without any explanation other than the recollection that the phrase 'bell, book and candle' was used in the Middle Ages to exorcize evil spirits."

Look, posing the question "Was Van Druten kidding when he claimed there are 'covens' of witches in Manhattan?" set out to search for them. Brief interviews with three female, unnamed, self-styled witches resulted.

The *Look* feature went on to point out that while *Bell, Book and Candle* was in production, director Richard Quine, producer Julian Blaustein and star Kim Novak became so mesmerized by the folklore of witchcraft that they found themselves arguing about how witches behave. " 'Witches might be able to *make* electricity, but would they turn off a street light?' 'What would a witch really do to a man she hexed into falling in love with her?' "

The film was released four years before Joseph had his first brush with *Bell, Book and Candle* in his Little Theater venture.

"As far as I knew, I was still the only person in the whole world who thought as I did about the Goddess, and so I kept quiet," he told me.

Joseph was not familiar with the *Look* article. From what he said, however, I gathered that their cast, too, speculated on the nature of witches.

That pastime, for Joseph, passed swiftly, simply and irrevocably.

"Another member of the cast was a real witch," he said. "I soon found out from him that there were many others who felt the same as I. I was no longer alone. He arranged for my instruction and initiation."

Today, Joseph's wife Daisy is also a member of the

Craft, although her initiation has been more recent.

When I first met Joseph (I've never met Daisy, although we have talked on the telephone and corresponded), they had four children. Joseph says, and Daisy agrees, that both of them knew from the beginning that their first child would be a girl. And so she was. That conception took place before Joseph was initiated into the Craft.

"We didn't plan it that way," Joseph explained. "But once Daisy was pregnant, there was no doubt in our minds that we were going to have a daughter. As soon as Daisy got out of the labor room, she told me our next would be a boy. By the time she got pregnant that time, I was a witch and that cinched it. That child was a boy."

It is common gossip among witches that they possess the ability, through magic, to predetermine the sex of their children if they wish to do so. According to the Wilsons, when they decided they wanted another boy, Brian was born. Then, for their fourth, they wanted a girl and Monica arrived.

"And for the fifth?"

Joseph threw back his head and roared. "Hey! Take it easy. Not yet."

I assured him I was only after "before the event" not "after the fact" evidence on prenatal predictions.

"Then you shall have it," he promised solemnly. "I can already tell you that when we are ready for the fifth, it will be a girl and her name will be Juanita Rose."

In my files is a letter Joseph wrote to me on March 5, 1969, to let me know "all the happy news of the Wilsons." In it, he told me that Daisy had been initiated during the Candlemas celebration of the Topeka coven and that their fifth child, a daughter, would be born in late summer.

Juanita Rose was born August 4, 1969.

To sum up the personal side of his life for the time being, it is possible to say that today Joseph Bernard Wilson is happy in his marriage, fulfilled by his children, challenged by the future his work has to offer and content in his religion. It would be possible to sum it up that way if Joseph were not a witch. Because he is, it is more accurate to put it this way: Today Joseph Bernard Wilson is challenged

by his marriage, curious about his children, satisfied by his work and engrossed by his religion. That seems to be the way witch values stack up.

Aside from witchcraft itself, because Joseph is tuned in to public relations and its "image" more than most witches, it was inevitable that we discussed that aspect. On that subject, he is not quite so lighthearted.

"Putting out *The Waxing Moon* was a calculated risk," he said. "After all, anyone can send for it and no questions asked. How they choose to use it is the risk. We have our safeguards, sure. We never publish any 'main-line' information."

"Then where's the risk?" I asked.

Joseph cited this example:

The October 1968 issue of *Eye* magazine, a Hearst enterprise published briefly in New York, ran an article written by Jay Levin called "The Magic Explosion." In it, Joseph was reported as saying that San Diego and Los Angeles are rife with witchcraft. He maintains he was never interviewed. He assumes that the writer got a copy of the newsletter and drew his own conclusions. He also pointed out that he had, in the article, been "moved" to Kansas City.

"An example of 'writer's transvection,' " he added wryly. "No real harm done. Except that for weeks afterward I was deluged with requests for interviews. It was a damned nuisance."

How do witches such as Joseph protect themselves from exposure to publicity which they neither seek nor desire?

Already I knew from experience about their underground. It is also designed to screen inquiries. How do they do this? Here is the way I have pieced together their techniques—with their aid and permission.

When a witch receives a letter, the first thing that happens is a psychometric reading.

Joseph Wilson and Harold Thomas, half a continent away from each other, are close friends. They agree that any letter, typed or handwritten, is thoroughly impregnated with the vibrations of the sender. (There go those vibrations again!)

If the witch receives the impression he is dealing with

a nut or a phony, back goes a letter of response in a sort of "I'm interested, too, and if you learn anything, let me know" vein. I've seen such letters and they are very smoothly done.

If the vibration test is passed, then the witch response may be a polite request for either a picture or birthdate information.

A picture, I was assured, will invoke an image that in the mind of a witch can, temporarily at least, substitute for a personal interview. The birth information will be used to cast a horoscope. A horoscope is to the occultist, Harold said, what an X ray is to a doctor.

In the third step along the underground way, if the writer lives in the vicinity of the witch, a personal interview will be arranged.

If not, a referral will be made to one nearby. Meanwhile, the witches involved in such a screening process will be in close touch with each other either by telephone or by mail to check and double-check their "impressions." Such a process can take many months.

"What's the hurry?" is the witch attitude.

"When someone asks about witchcraft, we don't say 'goody-goody' and lead 'em to the altar," Harold told me once.

"Two things must be made clear from the start," he added. "First, witchcraft begins with a belief in a Supreme Being. Arguments on this score dissipate. There is little or no theological debate possible. And, second, applicants ultimately must accept the fact they will spend the rest of their lives in the Craft."

But suppose a witch wants out?

Posing this question to a witch is rather like asking a doting husband if he ever considered divorcing his adoring wife. After I ascertained that abandoning witchcraft after initiation would not lead to punitive retaliation via magic by other members, I was inclined to drop that line of inquiry. As my understanding of their total absorption in witchcraft grew, I came to realize that, to them, the Craft is a long-sought-for expression of spiritual fulfillment.

The question of defection does not shock them. They are convinced that the very fact an applicant must work

through a lengthy apprenticeship before full coven secrets are revealed is sufficient test for sincerity of purpose.

Most of the letters of inquiry received through the personal notices in *The Waxing Moon* are processed in the manner I have described.

Joseph, of course, is more vulnerable to approach than most witches, simply because he is the publisher; his name is on the masthead and he is, unquestionably, a witch.

He also receives many letters asking for his cooperation in preparing articles about the Craft. He says he does not arbitrarily turn them down but judges each one on its own merits through his own screening devices. My first letter to him was, of course, such a one. And it is true that we did correspond for several months before making arrangements for a personal meeting.

What does irritate Joseph thoroughly are the letters he receives which imply that the writer is a Craft member.

He says he had been approached for information about American witchcraft on that basis by Hans Holzer, author of many books concerning the occult, such as *ESP and You, Psychic Investigator* and, more recent, *The Truth about Witchcraft.*

Joseph told me that American witchcraft rumor has it that Holzer sometimes suggests that he is, indeed, a witch himself. Joseph added that he had asked him about such rumors.

"He did not deny them," Joseph said. "Instead, he said he guessed they must be true and then went on to say that if he was to be the guide to the world through the Old Religion then he must be, to the outside world, a friendly observer. He refused to be pinned down to more than that."

"Is he or isn't he?"

Joseph had anticipated that question. His answer bounced right back.

"Doesn't matter to me. His approach, as far as I'm concerned, is a no-no."

Joseph refused to cooperate. Harold Thomas, also approached, blandly denied knowing very much about the Old Religion. Joe Lukach adroitly and consistently avoids any direct contact, although he personally knows many of

Holzers' other occult sources. And, as for the anonymous—you'll meet them later—members of a Cincinnati coven about whom Holzer has written, they have categorically denied to me that he ever attended one of their coven meetings.

7. Covens

For that matter, in America, few, if any, outsiders have ever seen a coven in action. I was unable to learn of any who have, although I understand this is not strictly true in England. Despite this restriction, I was able to find out a great deal about their varied modes of operation.

One of the thorniest questions in the inner circles of witchcraft in America is how to type coven practices for the purpose of instant identification. The four most commonly used labels (and they are bandied about with little clear understanding of their meaning), are: ceremonial, traditional, hereditary and Gardnerian. The latter, rapidly spreading in America, closely follows an English custom and will be treated separately in the next chapter.

Harold first began the study of prehistoric religions when he was a college freshman, several years before he was initiated into witchcraft. He, more than any other individual witch, was able to guide me through the confusion resulting from loosely applied terminology.

We first tackled the concept of ceremonial covens. Actually, this term is a misnomer. Many witches study *magia*. Many become adept. Some advanced students have introduced Cabalistic teachings into their covens. Since ceremonial magic relies heavily on the Cabalistic tradition, this has given rise to the belief that such covens may properly be called ceremonial.

Harold says that although it is theoretically possible to form a coven of witches composed entirely of ceremonial magicians, it is highly unlikely that this is done. He does not know of any such coven. Neither does anyone else.

Ceremonial magicians seldom embrace witchcraft. Why?

It must be remembered that witchcraft is a religion. Ceremonial magic is not.

The fact is, ceremonial magic is so complex and so symbolic that few have ever mastered the study. King Solomon is reputed to have been such a one.

Aleister Crowley of England, who died in 1947 at the age of seventy-two, is believed by witches to have been the most powerful ceremonial magician of modern times. There is little doubt in their minds that his fame rests upon his excursions into black magic.

Certainly his reputation is one of the sootiest of all times.

This "great Beast" (a mild term which he used himself) loftily referred to his organized orgies as "sexual magic." He boasted of his bizarre tastes and openly said he had driven himself to delight in dirty and disgusting debauches. By the time he was forty-five, he hit his orgiastic stride at the Abbey of Thelema which he founded in Cefalu, Sicily.

Rumors of ceremonial copulation soon filtered back to England, spread by disenchanted disciples. The "great Beast" was not the only male celebrant, it was said. He also enlisted the beasts of the field. Female followers were frequently mounted by goats. At the climax, the goat was sacrificed, its blood gushing over her shoulders and back.

The lid blew off the Abbey social sewer when one young male disciple died under mysterious circumstances and his widow returned to tell her story to the London newspapers. The goat gambit was considered too gamey to print, but her charges that her husband had died of an overdose of cat's blood and heroin was not.

Mussolini threw him out of Italy, and when the French authorities decided they wanted no *divertissements-au-Crowley*, they picked up his visa and back to England he went. Broke, but not broken.

Crowley wrote his own *Confessions* in 1929. Only two volumes out of six were ever published. They were collectors' items until they were reissued in January 1970. He himself expressed the belief that his own writings were too extravagant and specialized for a popular market. Nor did he believe that he possessed the ability to con-

dense the material, much less interpret it objectively. His judgment in this seems to have been astute. Thomas Lask, reviewing the 960-page volume in the January 17, 1970, *New York Times*, called the book a "long-winded and sometimes incoherent exercise in personal panegyric."

Meanwhile, the definitive biography of the "great Beast" has yet to be written. Charles Richard Cammell, attempting the task, admitted in his foreword that his effort was best considered a memoir, not a life study. Cammell, playing Dr. Watson to Crowley's Sherlock Holmes, does give us a vivid picture of the physical man as he knew him when he was sixty.

"He was a big man, tallish and stout, with an air of physical power, despite the delicacy of his small hands, of which he was extremely vain as indicating aristocracy," Cammell says.

Having described his eyes as "being the colour of horns," he goes on to report that "what did strike me about his eyes was that they were unusually round—the roundest eyes I have ever seen—and that he employed habitually the hypnotic gaze of the practiced occultist, using it much too frequently for major effect. His right eye was appreciably larger than the left. His eyebrows were rather long and were curled up at the outer corners—the only suspicion of theatrical effect about his appearance.

"Crowley's forehead was broad and round, rather than high: his head and face small compared with his burly frame. He was bald, except for two tufts of dark hair, shot with grey, which were brushed back and upwards. His face was broad; the nose short, straight and well-shaped; the mouth unusually small, with tight straight lips; the teeth, of which several were missing, were uneven and discoloured; the jaw and chin round, full, and eminently strong and resolute; the complexion, without the least touch of red, was tanned almost to the colour of yellow parchment by Eastern suns.

"I will add that his voice was hoarse, and his speech, till one was accustomed to hearing him, somewhat indistinct."

This was "The Wickedest Man in the World," as he was known to both sides of the Atlantic.

Crowley was baptized Edward Alexander. As a Cambridge undergraduate, he changed his name to Aleister because the sound was more propitious to magic, his only enduring passion.

Ceremonial magicians need money and lots of it. Taken seriously, it is a full-time occupation. This was not one of his early problems. He was born to wealth, inherited it and squandered it.

"Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law."

This was his personal motto. This phrase—Crowley quoting Crowley—still appears today as the frontispiece in his book *Magick* (he always spelled the word with a "k"), one of his few publications still in print.

He contributed to his own black legend in that same book when, in Chapter XII, "Of the Bloody Sacrifice; and Matters Cognate," he wrote, "For the highest spiritual working one must accordingly choose that victim which contains the greatest and purest form. A male child of perfect innocence and high intelligence is the most satisfactory and suitable victim."

News reporters made the most of that passage. His footnote, in fine print, is easy enough to overlook. There he states, "It is the sacrifice of one's self spiritually. And the intelligence and innocence of that male child are the perfect understanding of the Magician, his one aim, without lust of result. And male he must be, because what he sacrifices is not the material blood, but his creative power."

What does he *really* mean? By his own admission, he often used his own blood and the blood of animals in his rituals. Did he, or didn't he, stop there?

Crowley's loathing of all forms of Christianity amounted to a phobia. Yet the paths of Aleister Crowley and Montague Summers crossed, by some strange quirk, in the autumn years of both men. Summers' published tirades against witchcraft (the playpen of the psychic world in contrast to Crowley's sophisticated excursions) equaled Crowley's revulsion to Christianity.

The Reverend Summers found him "one of the few original and really interesting men of our age," according to Cammell, who witnessed their meetings.

Other glimpses of Crowley reveal him as a major poet,

recognized by the literary critics of his younger days as quite possibly a great one. He was a master of Yoga and other Eastern philosophies and religions, an accomplished linguist, world traveler and, although it seems incongruous, one of the greatest mountain climbers of all time.

Madman or Mage?

At the turn of the century, when Crowley was twenty-four years old and long before scandal swamped him, he became obsessed with one book, *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage.* This is a grimoire, a magician's manual. There are other famous grimoires. *The Key of Solomon the King, The Great Grimoire, The Black Pullet* and *Little Albert* are a few. The *Long Lost Friend,* a far simpler document than most, is a popular grimoire in use today in the Pennsylvania Dutch country.

Grimoires give step-by-step instructions for evoking, and controlling, a variety of infernal powers. Ceremonial magic is grandiose in concept. It aims for the spectacular—to give the magician the ability to levitate, gain the gift of tongues, become invisible at will. It can also serve to illuminate him and enrich his general knowledge of the Universe.

Crowley wrote that there is a single main definition of the object of all magical ritual. "It is the uniting of the microcosm [man thought of as a miniature representation of the universe] with the macrocosm [the universe itself]. The Supreme and Complete Ritual is therefore the Invocation of the Holy Guardian Angel: or, in the language of Mysticism, Union with God."

Grimoires are a maze of symbols, diagrams, mathematical computations, hieroglyphics, hexagrams, pentagrams and incantations. It is believed that great power is vested in words, not only in their meaning but also in their intonation. Power also resides in numbers, gems, colors and metals. Each has its place in the scheme of magic. Certain magnetic power is also assigned to each of the planets. Every hour of the day is governed by a planet; so is each day of the week. Bringing all these forces into perfect unison is only one task of the ceremonial magician. He must also prepare his altar and the tools with which

he is to work. Then he draws the magic circle which will protect him from the evil entities he has set about to attract. Why evil? He draws out demons, expecting to control them and force them to do his bidding.

A grimoire is as specific as the *Joy of Cooking* and as darkly dramatic as *Hamlet*. It is also considered a highly dangerous book. It is a widely held belief that, in all grimoires, a key ingredient has been omitted so the casual reader will not be harmed but the adept will realize what is missing and be able to supply it from his own expertise.

The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage was translated from French into English by Samuel Liddell Mathers. He and Crowley were both members of one of the most famous magical societies of the last hundred years—the Order of the Golden Dawn. The Irish poet William Butler Yeats, incidentally, was also a member.

Translating this grimoire was apparently Mathers' undoing, for according to Crowley, he perished spiritually in the process. "He became the prey of the malignant forces of the book, lost his integrity, was cast out of the Order of which he had been the visible head. He was an expert magician and had become accustomed to use *The Key of Solomon* with excellent effect. He did not realize that *Abramelin* was an altogether bigger problem."

The young Crowley was challenged.

Technically speaking, operation of the magical ritual of *Abramelin* requires six lunar months, divided into three definite periods of two months each, and it is recommended that it begin the first day after the celebration of the Feast of Passover or Easter and end at the September equinox. The object is to obtain the knowledge and conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel.

As the first step, the magician is required to write out an oath that he will perform the operation.

Crowley swore such an oath, but abandoned the operation midway. He did, or so he said, complete it successfully some six years later.

Witches who have studied ceremonial magic are convinced that the secret of Crowley's downfall may be found not in *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage*, but in Crowley's approach to it, which, in some

unknown fashion, aborted and destroyed him. They speculate that he damned his soul when he broke his early oath. Others suggest his spiritual devastation came later, after he completed the operation.

For the ritual does not end with the appearance of the Holy Guardian Angel. In fact, in Crowley's own words, "it is then necessary first, to call forth the Four Great Princes of the Evil of the World; next, their eight subprinces; and lastly the three hundred and sixteen servitors of these."

Talismans have to be prepared, and "these are to be charged with the power of these spirits. By applying the proper talismans, you can get practically anything you want."

What Crowley got was a cataclysmic dump into hell which twisted his genius and unhinged his mind, according to those witches who believe he completed the operation.

Even biographer Cammell, who deals more sympathetically with Crowley than most writers, commented, "To me Crowley appears thenceforth to have been a man accursed: he lost all sense of good and evil, he lost his love, his fortune, his honour, his magical powers, even in large part his poetic genius: only his courage remained, and his pride, and his indomitable fortitude and (most strange) his belief in his own destiny."

Certainly Crowley never lost his belief in his own magical prowess. In his later years, he often insisted he had learned the secret of invisibility. He explained that he could induce mass hypnosis long enough to allow him to pass through any gathering unseen.

This was one of the few feats Crowley claimed which was not taken seriously. One story, probably apocryphal, which went the rounds during his lifetime tells of him striding through a fashionable London supper club swathed in a long black cape. Upon his dramatic entrance, all conversation ceased. Sweeping through the crowded room, he made an equally theatrical exit. Whereupon, a dumbfounded dowager exclaimed into the silence, "What, pray, was that?" To which her dinner companion replied, "Oh, nothing at all, my dear. Merely Crowley being invisible again."

Witches today believe that Crowley would have better

served the cause of *all* magic, high or low, if he had learned the simpler secret of at least keeping his big mouth shut if he couldn't keep his trousers buttoned. Even though he's been dead for over twenty years, his reputation still casts a sinister shadow.

Bill and Phyllis Janney live in a two-story white frame house in Cincinnati. He is in the import-export business. She is a dietician. Both are articulate, attractive, magnetic.

Bill is compact, dark, his all-but-black hair threaded through with white. He said he began to turn gray when he was only sixteen. Phyllis is fair, porcelain-complexioned, as cheerful and sprightly as a bouquet of spring flowers.

They have never allowed themselves before to be publicly identified as witches.

When I was their guest in Cincinnati, Bill made it clear at once that their group had always sought privacy. They had finally decided to speak out if it would help gain public understanding for the Craft.

What led to this decision?

One of the factors was the same *Eye* article which Joseph Wilson had mildly complained about.

Shortly after that issue hit the newsstands, the Janneys discovered that overnight they were tagged as black magicians. Unlike Joseph Wilson, they were not identified as witches but rather as members of a magical society. Since this section started out by identifying Aleister Crowley as "the great black magician of the century," the Janneys believe they have been unjustly tarred by the same brush.

The first thing Bill asked me, in fairness to their entire group, was to quote the full excerpt from the *Eye* article as it pertained to them. Here it is:

"If they can afford it, magic orders maintain permanent lodges—an apartment or house decorated for the ceremonial and adorned with the symbols of the order. Generally only members or trusted candidates for membership may visit the lodge. Jerry Opfer, a young writer, was a membership applicant in a Cincinnati order comprised

mostly of businessmen and professional men. He described the scene:

" 'They took an entire apartment—the whole second floor of a small building—and converted it. There were four rooms. The first room was comfortably furnished. The second room was painted completely black: black floor with white paintings on the wall. No shoes were allowed. You walked in and were almost mesmerized by the gargoyles and symbols.

" 'The altar was in the center of the room with a large white circle with various symbols painted around it. It was just a simple black altar, a wood block, if you please. A gargoyle's head was on the altar. Skulls and bones were on the wall and various satyrs and statues demonstrating mild carnal scenes.' "

The article continued:

"The ceremonies Jerry was privy to were not for magical effect. They were more like training sessions in the rites and symbols of the order; preparations for the magic. It was like a *novena* [sic] where the priests say something and the congregation responds. They generally lasted from half an hour to an hour until an empathy was built up. At one instance, the priest turned and pointed to a symbol on the wall—a snake eating its own tail—and there was an awareness of what that symbol meant. Now that they knew its meaning, they could instantly relate to it."

Shortly after this issue of *Eye* appeared, the lodge was destroyed by vandals. Sick at heart, the coven closed up their quarters—they say forever—certain that the ravaging was a result of a misinterpretation of their role in magic.

Bill Saffin, a deceptively quiet and controlled man who might well have served as a model for early Grecian art, spoke up at this point. Bill and his wife Marilyn are both members of the Cincinnati group. He is a commercial artist. His paintings also hang in many a Cincinnati gallery. In fact, some of his best work had been slashed to ribbons when the lodge was wrecked.

I expected him to be bitter. He was not.

"We make mistakes. We're pushed all the time to talk about witchcraft. We never have. Perhaps we have been wrong," he says with his simple dignity.

"Today, we have our choice," he added. "Either shut up completely or take our place in the mainstream of American life and hope we're not butchered in the process."

Bill Janney spoke up again. In the inner circles of witchcraft, he and Bill Saffin are known as "The Bills".

"We want to be as open as it is possible for witches to be without revealing craft secrets which are known only to the initiated," he said.

With that, he suggested we go back to the kitchen—heart of the Janney home—while he checked on the pot roast we were going to have for dinner. Phyllis was working at the hospital that afternoon.

"We'll make a pot of coffee, too," he added. "I'm about to make a speech. So, let's get comfortable."

The coffee having been made and poured, Bill and I sat at the kitchen table while Bill Saffin wandered aimlessly around, listening intently all the while and occasionally nodding agreement.

"Susan," Bill Janney began, "it's not that we have an overwhelming passion for secrecy and the isolation that it brings. It's not even that we are a bunch of eccentrics—at least *I* don't think we are—who can't endure the hard glare of public opinion. Not now. Not today, in the Aquarian Age."

This is a term that crops up frequently in witch conversation. Witches, along with other occultists, believe that the history of mankind is ruled by astrological ages, each lasting approximately 2,500 years, and that we are now in the full tide of the Aquarian (Water Bearer) Age. They believe that we have finished with the Piscean (Fishes) Age which was ruled by the Christian Church. According to this belief, humanity is now free to explore the Universe spiritually as well as physically. They are also certain that the Aquarian Age will see the flowering of the occult world because it has ushered in a new 2,500-year-cycle of spiritual and personal freedom. They cite this as the reason why there has been a sudden spurt of interest in astrology and other occult arts.

"There will be a continuing growth of interest in witchcraft as well," Bill predicted. "But, by the same token, because witchcraft is a highly personal experience, we do have to resist the incessant demands of those who want to know our 'secrets.' In the final analysis, each person has his own 'secret.'

"You see, no one thinks it 'strange' or 'mysterious' if a psychiatrist refuses to unlock his files to anyone who asks for a rundown on the who, what, when and, most particularly, why he works with certain people to help them try to find themselves.

"And so it should be with witches. Many thousands of men and women in America today have, quite literally, *found* themselves through the Craft. I am one of them. Meanwhile, during this particular period of life on the earth plane when we are still loosening the bonds of the Piscean Age, we attract more than our share of the idly curious, the sensation seekers, or the fad-mad hounds who want to cash in on a new kick."

As far as "The Bills" and their wives are concerned, their background stories were growing familiar to me. All four of them had sought for "something." Witchcraft was their answer. Witchcraft is, as Bill Janney has put it, "a way of life."

For the record, they want it known that they are not ceremonial magicians in the image of Crowley. They consider themselves traditionalists. Like all witches, they are involved in magic.

Because America is a great melting pot, our witches, by and large, are a mixture of backgrounds and cultures. Their religious practices have not yet homogenized. For this reason, the vast majority of covens operating in America can be tagged "traditional."

Harold says this means that each one adheres to whatever tradition was followed by his predecessors in his country of origin. In America, these traditions can be Celtic (Irish, Scots, Welsh), Byronthonic (from southern Britain), Scandinavian, Italian, Sicilian, Hungarian, Spanish, French, Croatian, Germanic or Dutch.

The latter, he says, would include the hex or powwow groups rooted in the Pennsylvania Dutch country.

"They are more widely spread now, largely because of the natural movement of our population," Harold explained. "If you were to take a map and start at Reading, roughly draw an ellipse southwest, it would spread out to include Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Missouri, southern Illinois and northern Texas. These would be our witches who follow either the German or Dutch practices of hexerei. 'Hex,' itself, comes from a German word, *Hexen*, meaning 'witches.' "

Harold also explains that within all traditional covens there are different aspects of practice. Jane, adding the woman's touch to this point, said, "Trying to put all aspects together into a cohesive whole so the uninitiated could understand the differences would be like putting three cooks in the same kitchen—one Chinese, one French and one Italian—and ask them to stir the same pot. You'd have three authentic cooks. But the dinner?"

I know that in America rituals of worship do vary from coven to coven. I know, for instance, that one witch who has been initiated, say, in the Spanish tradition might well be invited to attend a ritual as a guest of another coven trained in the Celtic tradition. However, it is entirely possible that he would be unable to actively participate in the rite, simply because he could not fully understand it.

The deities of witchcraft, however, do not change. She is always the Goddess of Fertility, referred to as the Lady; he is the Great Horned God—the God of Hunting. They are the primordial gods, those which have existed since the beginning. They represent Life, Death and Rebirth.

The names by which they are called, however, do differ from coven to coven, although they are kept secret within the Craft. One witch will usually tell another which names are used by their own group. Although they may not use these names within their coven, some witches will speak of the Goddess as Diana and the God as Pan when talking to outsiders. Some authentic names have been published. The name Cerridwen has been identified as the Celtic name for the Goddess. The Gallic name for the Horned God, Cernunnos, came to light when an altar to him was unearthed beneath the foundation of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.

When I first heard that, the words of St. Gregory, a sixth-century Pope, came to mind. He has been quoted as saying, "As long as a people have their old places of worship, they will frequent them by force of habit." It would seem that his words were remembered when construction of Notre Dame was begun in the twelfth century.

From New York, I was unable to find out, either from a reasonably diligent search of easily available literature or from my witch sources, when the Cernunnos discovery was made.

When I least expected it, the information materialized. Quite out of the blue, I was summoned to Paris on emergency business of a personal nature. My time was as limited as my French. Shortly after my arrival, I casually mentioned my interest in witchcraft and paganism to Frank van Brakle, a close friend and a reporter for the *International Herald Tribune*. He suggested we visit the Cathedral immediately.

Frank sought out one of the nuns who served as a guide. His French is fluent, and through him, I learned from her that the Cernunnos altar was uncovered during the nineteenth century. She was not certain of the exact date. It is still intact in the *caves* of Notre Dame, but they are not on the tourist route and are sealed off for the sake of the safety of those who might get lost in the labyrinth. The *caves*, she assured me, are opened now only for the burials of French Cardinals.

Just as I have not penetrated the *caves* of Notre Dame, neither have I attended a Sabbat or observed any ritualistic meetings of witches.

Despite the fact that ritualistic details vary widely from coven to coven, some basic principles are common to all. A few of these will already be familiar from the ritual that was designed as a prayer for the purification of the earth, which I have incorporated in Chapter 5. This ritual, because it was worked out by witches representing many different traditions, could probably be called one of the first, if not the first, authentic "American" traditional rite.

No matter the tradition, all witchcraft rituals begin with

the nine-foot magic circle, drawn by a sword. You will recall that the ceremonial magician also draws such a circle. His is drawn to protect him from the demons he evokes to help him in his work. Witches draw theirs to help them focus their own power and to keep the magic inside.

Many of the "tools" witches use in their rituals, such as the sword, belong to the coven. Each witch, however, possesses a personal Athame. This is usually an eight-inch-long ceremonial knife. In most traditions, the blade is steel, the black hilt embossed with Craft symbols.

But even this kind of knife is not necessary. Some witches have been known to use a plain butter knife. Others feel more comfortable with a knife they have fashioned for themselves. There are no rules and regulations on this point, except one: The Athame is never used as a cutting instrument.

In their ceremonies, all witches burn candles. These can be any color. Only occasionally are black ones used. I am told that when they are, it is because the coven is working to displace an obstacle to their work as a group.

Incense is always burned. Many covens make up their own. Through trial and error, they will often hit upon a combination of ingredients they believe works best for them, not necessarily for other groups. More often than not, they keep such mixtures as their own coven secret.

Another secret is *The Book of Shadows,* commonly called a witch's bible. This is the handwritten account of all the rites, rituals, spells, charms and chants used by the coven. *The Book of Shadows* may differ radically in content from coven to coven.

By now, I hope it is clearly understood: It is possible to get hold of a witchcraft ritual. It is even possible for a witch to decide to make known the complete rites (and each coven has many, not just one) of the coven to which he belongs, although his fellow witches would take a dim view of such an action.

But it is not possible for anyone—even a witch—to crack *all* the secrets of *all* the traditions of *all* the covens.

All witches, however, no matter how their techniques vary, do work within the circle after they have purified

themselves with water. Witches undertake no ceremonial acts until they are scrubbed clean.

Then, joining together within the circle, they perform their prayers and incantations until they raise what they call their "cone of power."

What do they mean by this term? We know, of course, that man is an electromagnetic field and, as Lévi has stated, "The human nervous system is a perfect electric apparatus." Through their rituals, witches say they are able to concentrate their diffuse electrical energies into a beam and direct it outward as a force. This is their "cone of power." When it has been generated, then it is released from the circle to achieve the purpose preset by the coven.

Most of the time, this is for healings or blessings of coven members, their immediate families and friends. Occasionally, they will undertake to use this power on behalf of the well-being of a stranger who has appealed to them for help. They receive many such requests. Few are answered. In the first place, their ritualistic meetings are not held often enough to keep up with the demands. Second, these rites are held for worship of the Goddess and God. Even if they were to schedule special sessions in order to use their combined power to help individuals, they would soon drop from exhaustion. In the third place, any skilled witch can usually meet such requests alone through his knowledge of magic. But on those occasions when either a coven or an individual will undertake such work, they will not accept pay for their efforts.

Could the cone of power be thrown out as a destructive device—a psychic bomb? I asked Harold this.

"Oh sure," he countered. "But why swat a fly with a stick of dynamite? It's just not necessary. Hurling a curse at an individual enemy wouldn't require the energies of an entire coven."

Among themselves, witches will frequently talk of the "burning brand," however. By this, they mean that several covens might join together to raise a combined, and protective, cone of power at a time of national peril.

They believe that the brand has actually been passed twice in history, both times in England. The first was al-

legedly when all the witches in England gathered together in order to stop the invasion by the Spanish Armada. That was back in 1588. The invincible Armada, the united navies of Spain and Portugal, suffered severely in a nine-day battle in the English Channel. A storm wrecked many of the remaining ships off the Scotch and Irish coasts. Did the witches whistle up the storm? Some American witches are inclined to believe it. Some are not. None of them question that such an undertaking would be possible.

It has been said that English witches again joined together in a monumental effort to throw a gigantic whammy against Hitler to stop him from crossing the Channel after France fell. Whether this story is true or not, again, no one is prepared to say.

Several witches have told me that they personally know English colleagues who have assured them that individual covens in England did work hard during World War II to use their cones of power for the protection of their country.

But, political magic in America on a national scale is unknown to the witch underground. On the political front in the Western Hemisphere today, the President of Haiti is often pointed out as an example of magic being used on that level.

The Nixon, Mudge paper did not overlook it. "The President of the Republic, François (Papa Doc) Duvalier, a former physician, is himself reputed to be a powerful sorcerer, and his iron hold over the people of Haiti is attributed to a generalized fear of the consequences of his 'spells' if he should fall from power," they reported.

And hereditary witches?

A hereditary witch is one who has been born to the Craft through family ties. Sometimes the art may have skipped a generation. Most often, it can be zig-zagged back throughout the family tree. Joe Lukach, for instance, is one of America's hereditary witches.

This does not mean that all of the children of witches are automatically indoctrinated into the Old Religion, far from it. Most witches who are also parents will candidly admit that they cannot resist looking out for early signs

in their offspring that might indicate they have been born with psychic talent. They will observe and take note of such traits just as carefully and fondly as the average parent will regard the budding of a first tooth. If they spot such inborn ability, they take great pains to nurture it. If not, they provide whatever religious education they believe to be most suitable to the family's cultural and ethnic background. This is what the Thomases are doing.

Some few witches do believe that a psychically gifted child can be initiated while still a child. Others argue that eighteen should be the minimum age. Since there are no regulations on this point except those which would prevail in an individual coven, it can happen either way.

As it now stands, there are often one or two hereditary witches in traditional covens. But America is simply too new a country (by witch standards) and our society too mobile for hereditary covens to be established. A hereditary coven would be, of course, a coven composed entirely of hereditary witches.

And so, today, for all practical purposes, most American covens can be joined together under the general term, "traditional." So far, no overall "American tradition" has evolved.

As for the Gardnerians, they are a recent import from the British Isles and today are a vocal part of American witchcraft. They have not gained this toehold, however, without incurring bitter resentment from some older, long-established American covens.

"Here come the British, out to rule the Colonials again," declares one witch who traces the Craft in his family back to the days of the American Revolution. "The Gardnerians —particularly since they are Johnny-come-latelies—should be looking for similarities with other American witches, not looking down their noses at us because of our differences."

8. Skyclad?

In 1954, an English civil servant, the late Gerald Gardner, published *Witchcraft Today,* a book I have already mentioned. Presumably sincere in his conviction that the art had dwindled to near extinction, he was determined in his desire to jolt it back to life.

In his writings, he described as fully as he felt he could exactly what he thought witches believed and how they behaved and worshiped.

After his book was published, he was, according to his present-day followers, considerably startled to hear from covens in England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Spain, Italy, Lebanon, Australia and, yes, Africa. Witchcraft was not sick; witches were merely silent.

American witches remained silent as far as Gardner was concerned. Why? Some tell me it's because back in the fifties, few had ever heard of him or his books. Until a few years ago, they were hard to come by on the American market. Be that as it may, he arbitrarily concluded that witchcraft did not exist in America, except for voodoo practices which were common in New Orleans, having been imported through the Caribbean by way of Africa during slavery.

He was obviously wrong in his assumption.

Today, there are covens in Long Island; New Jersey; Louisville, Kentucky; San Francisco; Washington, D.C.; Boston; and Toronto, Canada—all of which have been "seeded" by two of Dr. Gardner's British disciples, Dr. Raymond Buckland and his wife, Rosemary. They are known to American witchdom as Gardnerians.

Since the Bucklands serve as spokesmen for all American Gardnerians, naturally I was anxious to meet them. I had seen a picture of them on the cover of *Beyond.* This pocket-sized magazine, similar to *Fate,* began publication in October 1968 and used a cover shot of the Bucklands, clad in ritual garb, to illustrate the "special witchcraft bonus section" which was a feature of the inaugural issue.

To me, the Bucklands, flanked by gaudy yellow and scarlet headlines which promised the reader other inside sensations, looked like a couple of self-conscious freaks.

He faced the world wearing a Viking-type horned helmet. His arms were crossed, Athame in one hand, wand in the other. The picture was cropped waist high. His skinny chest was bare. She stood behind him, elevated, fingering the horns of his helmet. Only her face and arms were visible. An unornamented metal tiara, with a crescent moon in the center, banded her head. Now, female witches, cartoon-style, are always depicted as beak-nosed hags. Rosemary was obviously no hag. That much was clearly evident from the four-inch-high picture. Even so, her nose dominated her face.

From the article "I Live with a Witch," which he wrote for that same issue, I learned little more about the practice of witchcraft than I have already reported. He made one additional point when he said, "Another of our beliefs is in retribution *in this life.* We believe that whatever we do will return threefold in this life. Do good to someone and you will receive three times as much good in return. But do evil, and that, too, will return triple."

Belief in the simple law of cause and effect is a popular one among witches of all traditions; however, this particular way of expressing it seems to have originated with the Gardnerians and is peculiar to their English tradition. They use it frequently as a slogan, in much the same manner as Crowley used his "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law."

Witches, upon initiation, received a name by which they are known to others in their coven. The majority of them are reluctant to reveal their Craft names. Not so the Bucklands. From the article I learned that he frankly states

he is known as Robat and she is called Lady Rowen.

Today, they live in Brentwood, Long Island. She is a housewife. He has a Ph.D in anthropology from Kings College in London but now works in America for BOAC. When I visited them, I was not really prepared to recognize them in person. What I found was that the *Beyond* picture was completely misleading.

Ray Buckland, or Robat, if you will, is a tidy, almost tiny man in his early thirties. Thick ash-blond hair frames his high forehead. His narrow, triangular-shaped face is accentuated by a neatly pointed beard. His eyes are serene, bluish gray. Rosemary's coloring is very much the same as that of her husband. She, too, is small and slender. As for that photograph, it did tend to emphasize her long, sharp nose, which viewed in profile is stunning. But full face? In person, it was my instant impression that Lady Rowen and Lady Bird Johnson share the same type of nose; nice to see but hell to photograph. There, aside from a similarity in names which both have acquired, the resemblance ends. Lady Rowen's hair flows long and straight down her back as naturally as a teen-ager's.

Personally encountered, both Bucklands possess natural charm, gentle humor and a trace of their former British accent. While Rosemary served tea and Nabisco Cameo wafers, we spent a very comfortable afternoon discussing the Gardnerian version of witchcraft in America.

About eight years ago they decided to pull up stakes and come to America to live. In tracing their history, I learned that both of them, originally members of the Church of England, had long been engrossed in occult studies.

Shortly after their arrival in New York, they began to correspond with Dr. Gardner, who operated chiefly from the Isle of Man, a small island thirty miles long by ten and a half miles wide in the middle of the Irish sea. It was soon mutually agreed that they would visit him there.

Although, as I had been told repeatedly, it is traditional for witches to advance through three degrees of the Craft, each step lasting approximately one year, the Bucklands undertook a "crash" program of study on the Isle of Man which they completed in three weeks. They were then initiated by Dr. Gardner and returned to the United States to establish Gardnerian covens here.

"What," I asked almost immediately, "is the difference between the Gardnerians and other witches?"

Robat answered.

"Probably no difference from what is simply known as 'traditional,'" he said. "The greatest difference is that, with Gerald Gardner, witches began to emerge from their secrecy. What Gerald did was to make witchcraft respectable. Because he is considered the Grand Old Man of British witchcraft, the name probably just stuck to his followers."

I don't know whether or not Gerald Gardner is considered the "Grand Old Man of British witchcraft" in England, but I do know that in America witches who are not Gardnerians—and they are in the majority—don't feel he had anything at all to do with the "respectability" of their religion. Quite the contrary. Many feel that the publicity he started has had quite the opposite effect.

The Bucklands admitted that their quickie conversion to witchcraft is, in itself, highly unusual.

"But then, it must be taken into consideration that we had studied for years on our own," Robat pointed out. "If Gerald hadn't found that we had done our homework properly, he certainly would not have initiated us."

They also differ from other American traditionalists in that, like Gardner, they are not in the least publicity-shy. They are the only American witches I know who apparently do not hesitate to pose for newspaper or magazine photographs and who court interviews. Before we discussed that phase of their activity, I was curious to know how their self-directed spotlight affects their children. They have two sons, Robert, ten, and Regnauld, nine.

"Robbie is a witch, too," Lady Rowen told me proudly. "He was initiated when he was about five." (This horrifies some American-born witches. Did he have any choice? they ask.)

"Let me tell you about something that happened which I think reflects a healthy, normal attitude," Robat said. "Once, Robbie came across a nudist magazine. He looked at all the pictures rather casually. Then, in one of the ads,

I suppose it was, he saw a small baby, held in his mother's arms, nude. 'Hey, Dad,' he said, 'isn't this kid a little young to be a witch?' "

Robat laughed. "Certainly he wasn't particularly curious about any of the other pictures. He doesn't consider the human body something to be snickered about in secrecy. I think that's a healthy attitude."

Rosemary got the giggles.

"Robat," she interrupted. "Remember the time the boys collected toads?"

He shuddered in mock horror. "Eye of Newt, leg of toad!"

"Now that *was* a shock. It gave me quite a turn when I came home from the office one afternoon and there, in the window, was a sign the kids had put out—'Toads for Sale.' They had nearly fifty of them. But in this house, of all places! 'What are you trying to do, ruin us all?' I asked them. Fortunately, in no time, they sold every last one. To other kids, mostly."

Rosemary will occasionally take a part-time job as a secretary. Most of the time, she is a suburban housewife, like many another. Perhaps she has a deeper interest in and knowledge of herbs than most. Certainly she keeps a well-tended herb garden.

Rosemary is also the vice-president of the PTA at the school her sons attend and is often busy lending a hand in the preparations for many school programs, including the Easter and Christmas festivals.

And Halloween?

"Now *there's* a religious holiday that's gotten to be entirely too commercial," Robat remarked. Lady Rowen smiled. They were only half kidding.

Their Long Island coven holds its rituals in the basement of the Buckland home. The basement is also used to house the Buckland Museum of Witchcraft and Magick (he, along with Crowley, spells it with a "k") which he, utilizing his anthropological skill, is attempting to establish as a self-supporting enterprise. It is, he says, inspired by and patterned after "The Witches' Mill," the home of the original Museum of Magic and Witchcraft started in 1950 by Dr. Gardner. ("The Witches' Mill" is to be found

on Arbory Street, in Castletown, on the Isle of Man.)

Because Lady Rowen has sometimes been casually referred to as a Witch Queen, she was very quick to point out that this is a misunderstood term.

The Bucklands explain it this way:

"When a female witch reaches the highest degree and breaks away to start her own coven, the High Priestess of the original coven is then a Witch Queen and her High Priest is known as a Magus. Obviously, there are several Witch Queens within the Craft—High Priestesses ruling over more than one coven—but it should be noted *there is no such title as Queen Witch or Queen of All the Witches.*"

Because Lady Rowen is now, and always has been, the High Priestess of the Long Island coven and is responsible for the development of the other Gardnerian covens in America, she is known to them as *their* Queen.

"This does not mean that I am Queen of the Witches in America," she added. "It is merely an honorary title I hold within the covens I have formed. I am sometimes asked by them for advice and counsel, but each of these covens has its own High Priestess."

This explanation of witch royalty is perfectly satisfactory to other American witches as long as it is clearly understood that they do not necessarily observe such an internal hierarchy. To them, any such implication that they should smacks of an initial attempt to impose a British system of aristocracy on all American witchcraft which they have no intention of honoring. However, they are more resentful of another Gardnerian attitude.

In 1966, Dr. Buckland wrote a small handbook called "Witchcraft—the Religion." It was published under the imprint of the Buckland Museum of Witchcraft and Magick. In it, he said:

"In only recent years did the Craft come to America. This is understandable when it is considered that the time that this country was first being populated was in the time of the fierce prosecutions of the witches in Europe. One or two individual witches may have come here but it is doubtful if complete covens did. The individual witch family in all probability died out, so there is no long background of true witchcraft in the United States."

That statement infuriates other American traditionalists. I told Dr. Buckland that I had been guided in much of my research into American witchcraft by Joe Lukach and explained that he traced his own background in two directions: one from his Hungarian grandfather who brought his knowledge from Europe and, two, from his mother's grandparents. I also asked Robat if he had ever met Joseph Wilson in Topeka.

He said that he had heard of *The Waxing Moon* but had not been in direct contact with Joseph. He added that he had little first-hand knowledge of any other covens or individual witches beyond those who belonged to the Gardnerian cults. Later, I checked back with Joseph. He told me this:

"That makes sense," he said. "American Gardnerians are all of fairly new vintage. Obviously, they cannot go back beyond six or seven years in this country since that's when the Bucklands arrived from England.

"My own coven in Topeka is Celtic," he said, "as are those in Kansas City and Wichita. Mine can be traced back to the settlement of Kansas itself. And we have been consistently in existence ever since."

One other question about Gardnerians which I could, and did, pursue. Do they or don't they? Is it true that they perform their rituals in the nude? This seemed to be another point of issue between them and American traditionalists.

Robat has been quoted repeatedly as saying that they always do. According to published reports, he wears only a bracelet. Lady Rowen's ceremonial clothing consists entirely of a thin silver crown, a necklace, two silver bracelets, a ring, and a garter with several silver buckles, each one signifying a coven of which she is the Queen.

Such candor on their part backfired, much to their amusement, when Hans Holzer, writing about that ceremonial garter of Lady Rowen's in *The Truth about Witchcraft,* referred to it as a garter belt!

They agree, however, that such reports are generally accurate and that they willingly posed for photographs when they felt that such publicity would help the Craft.

There can be no doubt that he means what he says. In the October 27, 1968, issue of the *New York Sunday News* an article about the Long Island coven appeared. Accompanying the story was a three-column photograph of four witches, naked from the waist up. Their facial features could not be distinguished. According to the cutlines which accompanied the picture, "Long Island witches gyrate in bare and bizarre ceremony based on rituals of ancient nature cultists. Witches regard nudity as an expression of freedom and believe clothing interferes with powers emanating from the body."

I had two questions to ask the Bucklands on this point:

First, do any members object to this phase of witchcraft?

"No," he said. "Quite the contrary. Those who do initially experience a mild embarrassment quickly find out that when everyone else is naked, they feel strange."

Second, is nudity *essential* to the practice of witchcraft?

"Absolutely," he replied with no hesitation, and Lady Rowen promptly concurred with this view.

"We believe there is a power which comes from the body which is blunted, if not impeded altogether, by clothing. The wearing of clothes within the magic circle would interfere with drawing the power from the body. In addition, nudity is also a symbol of freedom," he told me.

"We call it," he added, "skyclad."

And how do their neighbors react?

"There's been no criticism, if that's what you mean," Robat said.

"First of all," Lady Rowen joined in, "we lived here for a year, maybe eighteen months, before our neighbors knew we were witches at all. They accepted us then. They accept us now."

"Once we appeared on the Alan Burke show," Robat said. "Dressed, of course," he hastily added. "After that, a group of teen-agers came around the house. They didn't do anything. They just stood around, staring for a while. Then they went away."

They both went on to agree that *all* of the Gardnerian cults performed their rituals skyclad.

But how do others, who are not Gardnerians, feel about it?

Many disagree, sometimes vehemently. None take exception on the grounds of prudery or modesty.

"In the privacy of my own home, I run around naked any time I want to," Joseph Wilson said in response to that question. "But," he added, "since when is it some sort of commandment 'Thou Shalt Take Off Thine Clothes'? Nonsense!

"I have no objections of any kind at all if a coven wishes to perform rituals in the nude," he said. "What gets to me, as a witch, is the flashing of photographs all over the pages of the newspapers. I think it is hilarious that some of these groups have their pictures published and then put in a disclaimer somewhere in the copy that there is nothing sexual about their ritual. My goodness! I don't think there *must* be, but if you are going to try and tell me that I am going to be standing around stark naked and dancing around a circle with nude women and not going to be occasionally thinking sexual things—" Joseph began to laugh at that point.

"As a matter of fact," he added, "it might become quite obvious what I am thinking."

Joseph then went on to tell me that when his group meets, they frequently wear the everyday clothes they happen to have on at the time. On more ceremonial occasions, at the cross-quarter days, they don simple robes which wrap around the body, somewhat in the style of a sarong.

Members of the Cincinnati coven wear ceremonial hooded robes. They showed me a photograph which they had taken of one of their members standing before the altar wearing one of the robes which they use. It would be impossible to identify the wearer, even to the extent of determining whether the figure was male or female. Except for the symbols which appear in the background, the first impression would be that of a hooded monk from a secluded order.

Joe Lukach had never even heard the term "skyclad." When I sprung it on him for the first time, he laughed so hard it was a good ten minutes before I could get him to

consider my question seriously. And, when he did, he took a different tack from the others.

"Power," he said slowly. "Witch power," he repeated. He considered the concept silently for a moment or so and then said simply, "Susan, hold my hand."

With that, he extended his right hand and I placed my hand in his. Nothing further was said. Within seconds, I pulled my hand away. His was dry and hot, and while it was not in the least unpleasant to the touch, the sensation was distinctly disturbing.

"What you felt is concentration of the life force," Joe said. "The human body is capable of it. The right hand is positive, the left negative. The index finger of the right hand is the finger of concentration—one which we ordinarily use to make a pointing gesture. Call it electricity, call it energy, call it anything you will. Such a force can be brought into the human body and discharged. When witches work alone, or in a coven, this is the energy they are working with. Nudity has nothing to do with it. Certainly none of us wish to hamper this power with binding clothing. I never wear a hat, nor do I wear neckties. But, in the actual practice of witchcraft and magic, I prefer to wear a loose hooded robe. I find that the hood aids my power of concentration by blocking *out* outside forces."

He had one final sarcastic comment to add.

"If necessary," he said, "I could raise a cone of power while wearing a full suit of armor. And I know others who could, too."

Charles, the New England physician, takes a middle-of-the-road view.

"I know a few Gardnerians," he said. "I am convinced that they are doing what is necessary in their eyes. If nudity is part of their conviction, then I see nothing wrong with that either. What I *do* object to is the implication that everything which is not done their way is, of necessity, wrong. This is ridiculous. It is also illogical. There is no one way to practice witchcraft authentically any more than there is one way to practice medicine correctly."

And, for still another opinion, I turned to a California-based witch, Mack. I haven't introduced Mack yet because

he has a special story to tell later on. Mack, a free-lance photographer, travels extensively and steadily. I knew that he often worked in England, and as soon as I began checking out how other witches felt about nudity, I dropped him a note in Hollywood. When it caught up with him he phoned me long distance from his film location just to let me know he refused to even take the question seriously.

"Skyclad!" he whooped. "Sure, I've heard the term. But it's pure British as far as I know, and the word has always cracked me up. It's so artsy-fartsy. As for us, Blessed Be, Susie. We keep our pants on."

Mack simmered down then and assured me that neither he, nor any member of his group, cared one whit whether or not others wore clothes. He did point out, quite soberly, that it was their feeling that whatever advantages in power they might possibly gain through nudity—and he wasn't entirely sure there were many—could easily be canceled out by public opinion if they performed their rituals in the altogether.

"Put it this way," he said. "California is loaded with cultists, including nudists. There's nothing wrong with that. But anytime we, as witches, proclaim we perform in the buff, I believe that the only thing we really succeed in doing is to give the Old Religion still another black mark as far as the public is concerned."

In light of these varied comments and attitudes, I can only conclude that it is irrefutable that Gardnerians do conduct their rituals "skyclad" while other American witches may or may not, depending upon their traditions and convictions.

It seems to me that those who do not are concerned that the emphasis on nudity which the Gardnerians freely express might give the erroneous impression that witches are more interested in eroticism than in religion or magic.

All witches, however, including the Gardnerians, are fed up with the age-old notion that their rituals resemble orgies. Despite the fascinating hocus-pocus of *Rosemary's Baby*, they insist it is just not so.

9. For the Love of a Witch

In their personal lives, witches are single or married, heterosexual, homosexual or asexual. In this respect they are just like other Americans—their personal choice of a sexual style of life varies.

But where sex, love and marriage are concerned, there is one major difference that sets them apart from the rest of us. It can be summed up in one word—"attitude."

Modern American witches insist that, as a group, they have been branded, perhaps permanently, as sexually depraved creatures by the Christian Church. From time to time, there has been some talk in the witch underground that the name should be changed, perhaps to Druid.

This subject is always good for a heated argument when they gather. One faction feels that the word "witch" is perfectly serviceable and that public opinion will gradually change. They maintain that time heals all wounds, and since they are not ashamed of their religion, why bother? We've managed this long, why cave in now? they ask in effect.

On the other side, there are those who believe the damage to their collective reputation as decent men and women is irrevocable. So far, no one seems to have come up with a satisfactory substitute and there is no serious move afoot to adopt another name at this time.

But on one core point, both groups are in agreement. They complain that, even today, when their private lives come up for public scrutiny, they are kept quite busy insisting that the titillation of the sex orgy is not their main reason for being.

When they explain that they are simply followers of an Old Religion they believe is rooted in paganism, they find

they are seldom much better off so far as public opinion is concerned. As Bill Janney put it with some bitterness:

"Paganism! Explain that! Then people assume that while we may forego the more sinister types of sexual perversions, at the very least we must mate as indiscriminately and as casually as animals."

Bill Saffin shrugged. "Along about that time we lose our audience," he added. "I concluded long ago that Americans are obsessed by black magic and sex kicks. As far as witches are concerned, their attitude is like this: If it's bad, tell me more—if it's good, forget it!"

Witches are usually leery about discussing their personal lives. When they visit with outsiders—and they do circulate freely in all social groups—they monitor their remarks. This is their public face: friendly, good-natured, humorous—and guarded. Witchcraft is never mentioned.

Among themselves, it's a different story. They talk "shop" constantly, just as any other group is prone to do. Then their conversation is racy, and the rollicking sense of humor they all seem to possess comes up for air.

Even then, on their own home ground, their personalities are tempered by an almost indefinable aloofness. Sometimes I considered it an innate dignity, sometimes as a cool that never cracks. Cynicism? Never. They are too wrapped up in their mad love affair with life.

By the time I felt well grounded enough to pry into their personal relationships, I had already developed my own theory. Their aloofness, their dignity, their "cool" is not coldness at all. It is the natural end result of the attitudes they hold in common. I was willing to listen. First is *their* attitude on the subject of sex. This is what I heard:

Because the practice of the Old Religion requires that witches, individually or in a group, work intimately with all of the natural forces of the Universe, they believe they are far more sensitive than the rest of us to the power which can be engendered and expended through the act of sex.

Witches go beyond accepting the fact that sex is a physical drive. To them it is that, too, but it is also more. They believe that sex, in itself, is a powerful energy and that the genitals are a very important psychic center in which many

forces accumulate. Sperm is sometimes an ingredient in some of the potions they concoct for casting spells.

But the physical act of sex and how it is performed or with whom does not particularly preoccupy them, although they are just as capable of idle speculation on the sexual mores of their next-door neighbors as you and I.

If they ever read sex manuals, I would conclude they do so from natural curiosity and not for enlightenment and would consider such books a mild form of pornography. They simply do not seem to care who is topside up or bottomside down or what physical contortions are employed to induce orgasm. Their complete lack of interest in such details undoubtedly contributes to the impression they give of remoteness whenever the subject of sex comes up in a general conversation.

But refer to sex as a creative energy and not as a plaything, then you engage their attention at once.

They do care very much about how the sexual force itself is expended and to what purpose. They speak with a supernatural respect for this force just as they do for all others. Rather than use it for physical or emotional gratification only, they are far more apt to attempt to harness it for a specific goal as well. The Wilsons say they did this when they predetermined the sex of their five children.

They believe, as do others, that during the sex act, the energy generated by the genitals travels up the spine to the pineal gland. This is defined by the dictionary as a small unusual conical appendage of the brain found in all craniate vertebrates. It has the essential structure of an eye, and it is variously postulated to be a vestigial "third eye," an endocrine organ or the seat of the soul.

As the sexual energy travels this route, it forms a psychic vortex which is discharged through the pineal gland into the astral plane (more of that plane later). A soul awaiting reincarnation can then be drawn into the vortex and pulled down into the physical sphere of its future parents.

That is the theory. How the Wilsons went about controlling such a system, through magic, in order to attract either a male or female according to their own wishes, is their own secret.

What is obvious, however, is that they are a remarkably

close couple. By this I do not mean they live in a state of "togetherness" in the sense that they feel all family activities should be group projects. The Wilsons are frequently physically separated by circumstances. For instance, during our early months of correspondence, Joseph wrote to me from Fort Benjamin Harrison as follows:

"This is going to have to be a short letter. It's about 5:30 A.M. and I just got back from Topeka a half hour ago. I guess I'm one of the few people nutty enough to drive a total of 1,200 miles on a two-day pass just to see his wife."

I asked personally about that trip.

"I'd heard from Daisy, as usual, and everything at the house was fine. But, somehow or other, on Friday night, I began to worry. I *knew* that everything was not all right."

"How?" I demanded.

"Don't ask. Look, I know that communication—or lack of it—between husband and wife is almost a cliché. After all, I'm supposed to be a communications professional. Witches don't need that kind of talk when they are close to each other. Six hundred miles? That's only geographical distance. By broom, it's nothing. That Friday night I got the message 'Joe, the girl needs you,' so straightaway I went."

"Was everything okay?"

"No. But it wasn't serious. One of the kids had the measles and Daisy had her hands full. A real mamma-papa scene. One kid breaks out and next thing you know they flop like dominoes. So, I was able to pitch in and help Daisy fetch and carry until it was time for me to drive back and get on the job."

While Joseph knows a lot about the communications industry, psychology is a foreign subject, as it is to a lot of witches. Those who studied it usually approach the subject as lightly as an obstetrician who is confronted by an ingrown toenail.

I mentioned to Joseph the popular American indoor sport of using sex as a weapon to gain an emotional advantage over—or wring an emotional concession from—the sex partner. This was old familiar ground to me, since I have spent many years of my professional life in close association with social workers and knew from experience

that they are constantly faced with clients who are glued to the notion that sex is a negotiable instrument.

With a little encouragement from him, I found myself describing how many couples use sex as a weapon to control or hurt each other. I assured him that many such people quite possibly do not honestly realize they are doing so. The classic example I cited is the one of the wife who refuses to have sexual relations with her husband until he agrees to buy her a fur coat or underwrite an expensive vacation. Barter and haggling, I told him, shows up repeatedly in case records; one social worker I know calls it "legalized prostitution."

Joseph was fascinated. To me, this form of behavior was an old story. To him, it was news. Then I told him this true story:

I remembered one married woman in her late twenties who told a caseworker I know, as she recounted her married life, "sex was the one good weapon I had. I trained myself not to respond to his advances. It is very degrading to a man to feel his wife is not attracted to him."

To which Joseph could only respond with some awe, "And to think that witches are considered sexually depraved!"

By this time I knew that witches were much too forthright by nature to be manipulative in their personal relationships. They don't pit one sentiment against another in order to score emotional victories. They consider that a power play. They will, of course, use their magic as an influence. They think of influence as the ability to produce an effect without using coercion. Certainly they can be devious. When they feel threatened in any way, they dissimulate with such finesse that I can only salute their skill. This technique, they stoutly maintain, is reserved for self-defense. I have no reason to doubt their word.

Quite the contrary. On the other side of the coin, when they choose to be frank, their candor is disarming and childlike. Every reporter and writer is all too familiar with the experience of hearing a fascinating offbeat story, only to be told, "It's off the record." I expected this. It didn't

happen. One example of such candor that will always stick in my mind above all others concerns a Chicago witch whom I shall call Tom.

He is divorced. Apart from the fact that he is a practicing witch, he is one of the few American fathers I know who succeeded in gaining custody of his child, a ten-year-old daughter. Naturally, I asked him all about the trial, and as I expected the details were very juicy indeed. What I did not expect was his impersonal feeling toward his ex-wife. I probed for even the most oblique expression of bitterness toward her. I was finally convinced that he harbored none.

To me, it was a unique story. To him, it was just another entry in his total life experience. It was important to him that he turn it to a credit, not a debit, not only for himself but for his child, toward whom he felt a deep spiritual responsibility.

We had taped most of that particular interview. This was not by design. We had been speaking of other things pertinent to witchcraft, wandered aimlessly into the subject of his divorce and became too engrossed in that discussion to turn off the recorder. When I did, I asked:

"Tom, does the judge who gave you custody know you're a witch?"

"No. Actually, I don't suppose he does. It's all been five or six years ago. I joined the coven shortly after that. It's one charge my wife didn't hurl."

"Then hasn't it occurred to you that if your name gets into print—as a witch—your wife might have grounds to reopen the case?"

"That's a possibility," he admitted.

"Isn't it also possible you might lose custody on that ground?" I persisted.

"Oh, sure. Unless the judge happened to be a witch, too."

"Then aren't you going to ask me to keep this interview off the record? At least as far as the trial is concerned?"

"Why should I?" he said, looking at me with surprise. "If I thought you'd use it, I'd never have told you."

Tom, anonymous though he may be, is very much a part

of this book. He read some of it in manuscript form. It was he, as much as any other individual witch, who insisted that I emphasize that the tendency to manipulate human emotions and frailties is very unwitchlike. Tom, like many others, considers that particular trait destructive. Nor will they allow themselves, he assured me, to be manipulated.

By this time I had evolved my "collective personality" theory. This is not to say that if you've known one witch you've known them all. But I did find it true that they share, to one degree or another, many common traits. On the personal level, they can be, and are, disarming, trusting, amusing, funny, frank, wily and cool. But, as Tom insisted, they show little taste for manipulating other people to their own advantage. So if, for any reason, you are ever tempted to play house with a witch, I would suggest that you first consider the following advice:

If your ego is shaky, and you bring it to a witch for comfort, hoping for an emotional prop, do so openly and, by whatever God you swear, leave your own wiles behind. In any personal relationship, you will have to deal with them in exactly their own coin. If there ever can be such a thing as a "witch motto," it is best expressed by a phrase they frequently use: "Perfect Love—Perfect Trust."

I do not mean to imply that witches, despite their subtle aloofness, are necessarily cold and unsympathetic to the woes of other men and women. They are not. They, too, face their own emotional problems; they can understand yours. Again, there is a difference. Their first approach to a solution to your problems may come as a surprise. It did to me. And this leads to the second major attitude that sets them apart from the rest of us: their belief in reincarnation.

This, with them, is not a theory that comes up for philosophical discussion over candlelight and wine from time to time. This belief permeates their entire being and, as a result, influences all their actions and reactions.

There are many books on the subject of reincarnation. This is not meant to be another. Two modern ones that

witches consider very well done are *The Imprisoned Splendor,* by Raynor C. Johnson, and *Many Lives, Many Loves,* by Gina Cerminara.

These books are primarily concerned with an exploration in reincarnation, what the theory is, how it works and the psychic experiences of many people who, through hypnosis or other means, have come to believe in it through recalling a previous life.

Such books are informative and fascinating reading. But there is a vast difference between reading and living.

With witches, it works this way:

When they are approached by another who has a problem to solve, they don't use psychotherapy. They turn, instead, to their knowledge of magic.

But within the structure of their own personal lives, this technique is impractical. Aside from the enormous energy required to perform even one feat of magic, day-to-day living is simply not composed of one miracle following another, as splendid a solution as that might be.

No magic formula solves the problem of whose turn it is to do the dishes or who is going to empty the garbage or who is responsible for balancing the checkbook. They recognize, along with the rest of us, that such seemingly simple problems as these can cause everyday marital hang-ups.

But are these problems really simple? Or did they, like so many others which hinder the adjustment of one person to another, spring from deep underlying psychological reasons?

If you are living with a witch and such problems do arise, certainly it is possible to discuss them openly and search through your early life experience which may lie at the root of the trouble.

What is the source of your distress?

Are you suffering from the unresolved conflicts of an unhappy childhood? Most of us, after all, do.

Do you trace your problem to inept toilet training on the part of your mother? A predilection toward incest on the part of your father?

(No one seems to emerge victorious from the breast-

versus-bottle battle—mother, child or father, Joseph Wilson once remarked.)

Without blanching or clucking, your witch mate will discuss every detail of all these possibilities and more, if necessary. But such a conversation will be confined within *his* frame of reference, and that means reincarnation.

Are you ready to answer such questions as these? I have heard witches discuss them at length.

Why did you choose your parents?

This can be a rough one. Haven't most of us cried out more than once, when the going seemed impossible, "I didn't ask to be born"?

But, you see, you did, according to witchcraft beliefs. And you even chose the circumstances of your birth in order to gain a particular life experience which will speed your progression to an ever-ascending higher plane as one life succeeds another. Therefore, your life is your responsibility alone. If your mother was a fool and your father a brute, that's their misfortune, not yours.

Nor does it matter how brutal or hopeless such circumstances may seem. If they are physically or emotionally insurmountable, then you are merely discharging a debt which you incurred through misusing some of the assets you enjoyed in a previous life. Patient resignation to that hard fact is not enough:

Are you learning that lesson during this particular sojourn on the earth plane? What progress are you making? How will the decisions you make today affect the life you are slated to lead when you return to begin the cycle all over again?

To your witch lover, you are not an innocent victim of the quirks of life. You are a *permanent* participant. There is no Prince Charming, no Sleeping Beauty, no Magic Wand. Acceptance of their belief in reincarnation automatically strips you of all the fantasies of romance and all the comforts of self-pity. Even your guilt complexes become a luxury and have to be jettisoned because they are a drag in the marketplace of life.

And so, if you are ever tempted to embark upon a romantic witch-hunt, I would strongly recommend that you

keep those thoughts in mind. Witchcraft, as Bill Janney has remarked, "is a way of life."

Two male witches from New York—one, Ralph, happily married; the other, George, equally content as a homosexual—have never met and probably never will. Yet they chose an identical succinct word to sum up their outlook toward their personal involvements.

"Selfish," they said, as if they spoke in unison.

By this, they do not mean a material selfishness as it is ordinarily accepted by our current ethical practices. Nor does it reflect the "I'm looking out after Number One" school of thought. It is merely a word witches frequently use as a short cut to express their dedication to the principle of "live and let live."

They believe that the first responsibility of an individual is toward himself—or herself—to develop his potentials and powers to the highest degree of which he is capable.

They believe that each person in the Universe has an individual destiny to fulfill and each person must find this destiny through following his own path. Otherwise, they themselves would be guilty of the greatest offense of all: emotional trespassing.

They seldom prattle of "love," although this is a matter of semantics. Many have told me they feel the word is badly overused as a coverup for other, less lofty emotions. They cite possession, fear, pity, frustration, self-gratification and hatred as a few that masquerade under the guise of love.

Rather than "love," such words as "vibrations" (as we all know by now) or "harmony" are in common usage.

In spite of all this, if you ever do decide to join up for a highly specialized adventure in life, the companionship of a witch may ease some of the lumps and bumps of life, if you are willing to accept their attitudes. Since you don't stand a chance of changing them, remember this:

Never, never, never expect an emotional piggyback ride.

Many of the married couples I know who have found personal satisfaction and gratification in the Craft have come to it as an already-married couple, apparently

predisposed to work out their destinies on a harmonious level which will ultimately benefit them both as two individuals let loose in the Universe.

Raymond and Rosemary Buckland have been married for over thirteen years. Although neither was an initiated witch at the time of their marriage, both entered the Craft together. Rosemary and I discussed marriage in general and in what manner witch unions might differ from others. She draws not only from her own relationship with her husband but from her friendship with and interest in the problems of other married couples who belong to her coven.

"I think witches are more tolerant than other people," she said. "We don't live by narrow standards or accept rigid behavior patterns. We are far more inclined to accept people for what they are, with little inclination to make them over in our own image."

I asked if she and Robat encountered any particular marital difficulties.

"Not really," she said. "Mostly simple things. If I want to go to a concert and he wants to see a certain movie and we can only do one, not both," she said.

"Many couples fight vigorously on just such simple issues," I remarked. I was thinking of my years of close professional association with social workers who specialize in marriage counseling.

"Yes," she said, "I know. In our case, sometimes it works out that we do what he wants—sometimes what I want. It's totally unimportant. You see, it all evens out in the long run."

"Sometimes do you go to the concert while he goes to the movie and then share the experience later?" I asked.

"No," she said. "We don't use that solution because we really enjoy doing everything together." Robat agreed.

"Some of my friends who aren't witches don't really understand my attitude," she admitted. "They'll ask me such things as, 'Rosemary, when you give in to Ray, how do you know he's not taking advantage of you?' It is hard for them to understand that witches give freely with no thought of return."

Rosemary summed it up this way: "When you give, how

can you lose?" And then repeated the phrase: "Perfect Love—Perfect Trust."

Joe Lukach, on the other hand, decided quite deliberately and quite early in life to be a permanent bachelor. He says he would consider himself truly "selfish" in every modern sense of the word if he were to undertake a marriage based on escape from loneliness or for the physical comfort and ease such a liaison might offer. Many Americans do get married for just such reasons. Joe is certain that this is all marriage could mean to him.

"By nature I am restless and have a very low tolerance for boredom," he explained. "I just don't believe it would be possible for me to actually live twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, with one person. Their very vibrations would make me twitchy after a while. Nor do I believe I could supply the emotional support to any one individual that is necessary to a good marriage. I agree with my married witch friends that less is demanded in a witch marriage than in others, but, even so, a minimal amount is required of anyone. That's only fair."

Joe also faced the fact that when, at twenty-three, he abandoned his musical career to devote the rest of his life to teaching magic and serving as a psychic adviser, he accepted to some degree the emotional problems of many people. Most of them are transients in his life, but each one is a psychic responsibility as far as he is concerned.

Today, he believes that his greatest emotional hazard lies in his encounters with people he calls "metaphysical tramps."

"These are the people who search out another who is gifted with psychic power," he said when I asked for a definition.

"They will offer you their love and friendship until they finally realize that the 'supreme miracle'—the 'magic wand' that will turn their world to solid gold—is not in your possession.

"Then they move on to the next one and the one after that. These are pitiful souls, really. They never realize that the earth life experience *is* the magic wand. They must learn to wave it for themselves. No one can do it for them. Yet they keep hunting."

Joe also believes that this futile psychic search is a basic reason why so many nonwitch marriages fail and multimarriages, often referred to as serial monogamy, abound.

"A lot of men and women are conducting a similar search, but on a more earth-bound level," he said.

Since little statistical data on witches exists, it is impossible to estimate how many of *their* marriages succeed or fail.

But it can be said that their views on what constitutes "success" or "failure" are far different from the views held by the majority of Americans.

Based on the belief expressed by Joe that "the earth life experience is the magic wand," it follows that when a personal relationship dissolves, the people involved have not necessarily "failed." They may even have "succeeded."

"They have not lost anything," Joe insisted, "they have merely learned something."

Others who, like Joe, have been more or less born into the Craft and who have developed their powers and gifts throughout their entire lifetime, sometimes encounter another problem entirely which makes it difficult for them to form personal relationships.

A physical barrier can exist as well.

The simplest explanation Joe can find for this phenomenon—and it is not in the least uncommon to a witch—is to compare it with static electricity. He had already demonstrated to me his ability to concentrate energy through his hands.

"When the weather comes on hot and dry and you walk across a rug and snap on a light switch, you can get a shock, right?"

"Right," I admitted.

"So what do you do about it?"

"Scream to the building management about their lousy wiring, of course, even though I know it's not their fault."

Joe laughed ruefully.

"Well, I can't. I often get similar, slight shocks. People give off vibrations, as you now know. I happen to be sensitive to them. My mother has told you that even when I was still in my crib there were people I wouldn't let touch me, not without screaming."

Even today, Joe rarely allows anyone to touch him if he can tactfully avoid the contact. To those whose vibrations are pleasant and in harmony with his, he displays a very natural, open affection.

But shaking hands with strangers is a permanent problem.

"I do, of course, because it is a matter of normal social politeness. I don't have to touch anyone in order to pick up their vibrations. And, of course, I run into my share of people I simply don't want to touch, even for a handshake. It's unpleasant. I get that nasty shock."

When faced with the situation—which he is every day—he explained, he simply tries to block it off by not transferring any of his own magnetism through his own hand.

"And then," he added, "as soon as I can—when they aren't looking—I shake my hand off. Sometimes, if I can, I'll go wash them instead."

The anonymous New York witch called Ralph met his wife one night at a party and they were married two weeks later.

"Love at first sight?" I asked.

He looked at me quizzically as if he had never heard the trite expression before.

"Not exactly. Her vibrations were great. You see, you know at once. Like it hits you."

Ralph's wife is a placidly sweet young woman in her early twenties. It's perfectly obvious that she is not a party-stopper and it would be quite possible to be introduced to her on several different occasions without remembering that you had met her before. Eventually, her personality does come through and you realize how likable she is.

"Vibrations have nothing to do with glamour," Ralph said candidly. "To a witch, there is something very special about the person you marry and you feel it the instant you see her."

"And what did you do?" I asked.

"I introduced myself and asked her to marry me," he said simply.

"It didn't take long to convince her," I pointed out.

"You mean the two weeks? Oh, no. She said 'Yes' right away. It took one week to convince our families we weren't

quite mad and another week to get the blood tests and City Hall things."

"Is she a witch, too?"

"Of course."

But you don't have to be a witch to marry one. In fact, you may be married to one, and not even know it. One reason many practicing American witches do not join covens is that they don't want to have to explain their mysterious absences from home to their unsuspecting spouses. Instead, they are quite content to burn incense, offer their prayers silently, and develop their powers of concentration privately. They are happy enough to be described as "highly intuitive" or "extraordinarily sensitive." They develop friendships with other witches who instantly recognize them for what they really are and they can be absolutely certain that their fellow witch will keep their secret and will not make even the slightest effort to bring them into a coven.

One such witch is Robert, a New York–California truck driver. Robert's reluctance to speak out does not stem from any fear of publicity that might cost him his job. But it might, he believes, cost him his wife.

"Will you ever tell her?" I asked.

"I don't know. I simply don't know. She is just right for me. And I believe I'm right for her. She's not narrow-minded. I couldn't tolerate that. But she is still too tied to her family. And they are a bunch of bigoted, Bible-beating Baptists."

Although he has kept his mouth clamped shut insofar as his involvement in witchcraft is concerned, he does not consider that he has deceived his wife in any way.

"She understands that I have a sincere belief in a Superior Being. But I have refused from the beginning to go to church with her. She accepts this and always has."

Robert said that he drives a truck because it is a good living and requires no emotional output. He is deeply immersed in the study of numerology.

"My wife knows that and thinks nothing of it. Most people, you know, do have a whopping interest in the occult, whether they'll admit it or not. She considers nu-

merology very clever and me a very clever guy."

It is far more than that to Robert, however.

"Sure, all witches believe in the same deities. And after that, we spread out in our occult interests. Numerology is my bag. It's simply the way my mind works. I visualize the universe as one master computer. And I believe in the mathematical precision and balance of the universe. Others tap into the mysteries in other ways. But we're all tapping the same source."

As Robert at present has it figured out, he expects to spend at least another five years in concentrated study. He hopes that he, too, will someday become adept enough to serve as a psychic adviser to others, and he hopes to use his knowledge of numerology to aid him in this work. Until that day comes, he plans to continue right on driving that truck and keeping his own counsel. He knows that he is not alone.

Joe Lukach tells of a woman he has known for some time whose powers, to him, "come on strong." He knew she was a witch the moment he met her. After ten years of marriage, her husband still does not even suspect.

"There is no reason why he should," Joe says.

Other than to offer the customary "his vibrations were right for her and she knew it," he makes no attempt to explain the marriage.

This one, as Joe traces it, has had its ups and downs and could qualify as an example of a case history written up by a marriage counselor, except that the wife has no need for outside help to solve her marital problems.

It would go like this:

The husband is a dynamic young junior executive, highly competitive and extremely ambitious. He loves his wife. She is a wonderful partner, understanding mother, excellent housekeeper and a marvelous lover. But he is ashamed of her. While she has kept her figure, she dresses like a gypsy, and her personal appearance means a great deal to him. More and more, he is forced to leave her home when he entertains his business friends. He is about to call it quits. If she can't make an effort to fit the role of a corporation

wife, he'll be forced to ask for a separation. He's tried everything else.

When he finally did just that, she left, without tears or recriminations, for California. Two weeks later, he abruptly left for California himself, as if he had been pulled by a string. The move worked out better than he had any reason to expect. He got an even better job with a bigger company. The pattern repeated itself in California, so she returned to New York. Again, he followed—and got the promotion he had been angling for.

The story, which always amuses Joe, is not over yet, he predicts.

"She simply wills him to her side and he goes. In return, he gets what he wants—success and position in the business world. He's been charmed up to his eyeballs and doesn't know it. I'll bet that within another ten years he'll be president of his company and she will still be slopping around in purple skirts and orange blouses. They'll be happy together. And he'll never really understand why."

Another witch-versus-nonwitch marriage fascinates Joe, although he is the first to caution that, in this case, the husband who holds the power is not a true witch and, if he were, he would most certainly take up the Black Arts.

"He has an enormous native psychic power and knows that he possesses it. He'd kill it off if he could," Joe says.

"He was born with the makings of a very powerful witch, but his motives are highly suspect," he adds.

For Jimmy, as he calls him, has an uncertain temper.

He nurses a lurking dislike of his in-laws. A long series of minor—but painful—disasters has plagued them ever since Jimmy married into the family. They happen within a few days after Jimmy gets mad over something. So far, the correlation between Jimmy's anger and the mishaps has never struck anyone—except Joe and Jimmy's wife—as being more than coincidence. A few "coincidences" include:

His sister-in-law's dog dropped dead shortly after snapping at Jimmy's baby girl; his brother-in-law's new motorcycle was stolen immediately after he blew some poker winnings to buy it instead of repaying a loan to Jimmy; he appears to be the number-one target on Jimmy's hex list,

for he later fell down a flight of stairs and broke a leg (he soon blew the insurance money, too). His mother-in-law—Jimmy calls her "meddlesome"—has developed such severe arthritis she can seldom manage a visit.

"Jimmy knows full well what he's doing," Joe says. "He even calls me up when he's in a fit of temper to announce his intentions. "So far, I've never made any attempt to stop him. He acts on provocation. It's instinctive retaliation, not wholehearted revenge. I can't resist thinking of him as an "Avenging Angel." He has a natural power to perform mental magic. I may not always agree with him, but I do admire his talent."

In Jimmy's case, his wife suspects but cannot, of course, prove her suspicions and is not about to try to do so on such flimsy circumstantial evidence. Quite naturally, she is not about to incur Jimmy's wrath.

"She is," Joe remarks wryly, "an obedient wife."

Could he be stopped?

"Certainly," Joe says. "Protective charms would counterbalance his destructive desires. It would grind down to a classic battle between the forces of good and evil.

Charms, Joe assured me, were powerful protections against harm.

"One girl I know quite well came to me one day and told me that the boy she was interested in was being sent to Vietnam. She asked me if I would charm him and protect him. I did it for her sake.

"The following week, he wrote her a letter and told her that for several days he had a very strange feeling. He described it as having 'a wall around him.' He flew a helicopter and he said that he had lost friends one after the other—buddies who were shot and killed. But he was never touched. His exact words were, 'I'm leading a charmed life.' He lived through his tour of duty without so much as a scratch."

"Did he ever find out?"

"Yes. He did."

"How?"

"My sister finally told him. He's my brother-in-law now."

"And how does he like having a witch in the family?"

"He's not quite certain."

Love potions!

Does everyone want one, or does it only appear to be that way? It's either that, or a hex, witches agree.

Many people who know Joe as a witch as well as a psychic advisor ask him to make up love charms or brew love potions. This he, like others, is reluctant to do.

As far as those ever-popular love potions are concerned, witches tell me they are not particularly difficult to concoct. There are no set formulas. They can take the form of charms to be worn, potions to be secretly slipped into a drink or powders placed to come in contact with the person it is meant to affect. Or it can be a special brew, sped on its long-distance missions by the flame of a candle. In that case, no personal contact is necessary. Each love potion, no matter its form, is custom-made, tailored to fit the circumstances. Instructions for their use vary accordingly. There are literally endless combinations. Every witch has worked out his own favorites.

But the truth is, they seldom make them.

"Out of every fifty people who ask, only about two receive," says Joe, who has probably prepared more of them than any other witch I know. Charms are, after all, his witch specialty. He explains his reluctance this way:

"Motive. Pure and simple. I would refuse—and have—to make a love potion for a girl who wanted to break up a love affair and grab the man for herself. Yet, I made one recently for a girl who wanted to marry her boyfriend. He was holding back because his mother was having fits about losing her little boy." Joe frowned his disapproval. "Now, that's destructive in the first place. So, she got a few drops of his blood, plus his picture, and I went to work, using image magic that time. Today, they're married."

"Then you say the love charm, which he knew about, gave him the guts to go ahead. Would that be sort of psychological—not magic?" I asked.

Joe laughed.

"Well, it *could* be, of course. But not this time. You see, charms sometimes work out in strange ways. Actually, his mother met a man that same week and . . . well, in a surprisingly short time, she forgot about losing her son and started concentrating on gaining a husband."

Joe's eyes began to glitter behind his horn-rimmed glasses.

"On the other hand, I refused to make a love potion for a girl two years ago," he said, smiling at the memory. "She was mad for this guy who didn't even know she was alive. She shopped around until she found an obliging witch. The witch may have been unscrupulous, but he sure knew his magic. In no time at all, she married him."

"What was wrong with her motive?" I asked.

"Nothing, really. Except he turned out to be the real son-of-a-bitch I suspected he was and she's miserable."

Then he offered this piece of witch advice: "Be careful before you ask a witch to work magic in the name of love. You may *get* what you think you want."

10. Give the Devil His Due

When the flush of the newborn sun fell first
  On Eden's Green and Gold
Our Father Adam sat under a tree
  And scratched with his stick in the mould
And the first rude sketch that the world had seen
  Was joy to his mighty heart
'Til the Devil chuckled behind the leaves . . .
"It's clever . . . but is it Art?"

—*Rudyard Kipling*

The Devil has been chuckling at man ever since.

Who is this Devil . . . this Satan . . . this Lucifer . . . this Creature of the Dark?

There have been, and still are, opposing points of view.

On the one hand, witches claim he is a creation of Christianity. They do not believe in this Devil. They do not believe in Satanism either, for that matter.

On the other hand, during the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, the witch-hunters believed passionately in the physical existence of the Devil. They were convinced that witches wrote their pacts with Satan in blood and were thereby bound to do his work as his agents on earth. And sexual depravity was the major thrust of that work.

In their zeal, they made no distinction between witchery and sorcery, which American witches insist upon, and quite literally accepted the Biblical exhortation: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." (Exodus 22:18)

And set about to do just that.

Most modern American witches are convinced that many of the lurid conceptions still surrounding their craft are

systematically fed by the confessions of those wretched men and women who were tortured to death during the witch-hunt craze. They believe that some of those confessions are still being accepted today as contemporary truths.

Before their point of view can be understood, it is necessary to grasp one central thought and hang on to it. This is one I worked out for myself before my sensibilities reeled from hours of reading about the sheer horror. Those witchcraft trials cannot be viewed in the light in which we now understand Justice. No matter how many dissenters and rebels are clubbed to their knees today, no matter how wildly the scales of Justice may wobble in our own Courts from time to time, our practices, even at their worst, are benign compared with European practices of those years.

Consider this:

No evidence was required. Any accusation would do.

Physical torture of the accused was not only accepted, it was required.

Confessions *without* torture were considered inadequate on the basis that a "witch" might take the easy way out and voluntarily confess to degradations with the Devil in order to escape death.

Nor could confessions under torture be rescinded before a higher tribunal. Such a course of action merely served to prove that the Devil never gives up and ensured another round on the rack. Naturally enough, witches confessed.

Such confessions varied, depending upon the vigor and imagination of the Inquisitor and the willingness of the victim to admit to anything at all. In general, however, it was agreed that the Devil assumed many physical forms.

He could be a serpent, goat, raven, stork, bull, deer, dog (usually black), bird or horse, or appear in varying combinations sometimes with, sometimes without, human features.

His preferred fashion of fornication was dog-style, unless the woman was beautiful, and then, some admitted, the sexual approach was a frontal assault.

But what fascinated the Inquisitors most about the Devil was not his physical form in general, but in particular. To be specific, what about his "member"?

It could be heavy as the tool of a mule, thick as a brawny arm or scrawny as a long, thin finger.

Some swore that the Devil was possessed of a two-pronged penis, forked like the tongue of a snake. Some swore it was one-half human flesh, the other half iron or the horn of a stag. It was a most efficient—and flexible—instrument, capable of penetrating both the vagina and anus at the same time. There were even some who swore that it was three-pronged like a pitchfork, allowing for a simultaneous oral workout as well.

Sex with the Devil was almost always described as being an unbearably painful procedure and submitted to only from obedience or fear. No matter the size or shape, the Devil's member was usually as cold as an icicle. The semen it spewed ("demon semen" is my favorite term) was also more often cold than warm—thick, yellow and putrid.

This charmer was the guest of honor at the witches Sabbat, and the festivities began with an act of obeisance to him—the *Osculum Infame*. Known then as the "Kiss of Shame," the expression is better known today in the slangy vulgarism, "kiss my ass."

Protocol observed, the Guest of Honor then took his pleasure with each female witch in turn. His desires were said to be insatiable and his supply of semen inexhaustible, but rotten, since he gathered it from the nocturnal emissions or masturbations of human males. No one seems to be quite certain how this was managed.

Thus, having given the Devil his due, the orgy was on. The details from then until the crow of the cock at dawn can take you wherever your imagination may lead.

Enter the demons, all 7,405,920 of them, commanded by 79 Infernal Princes responsible only to Satan himself. These legions were tabulated and named by John Weyer, a sixteenth-century French physician and student of witchcraft.

Of principal interest to the demonologist were the succubi and incubi. Summoning enough energy to condense to human form, the succubus appeared to the human male as a seductress. Having succeeded in this mission, the suc-

cubus would then regroup its energies into the male form of an incubus and, properly equipped with the necessary semen, appear to seduce a human female.

It was generally believed that these demons in the forms of incubi and succubi did not enjoy the sexual relationship itself, but got their kicks from the domination and subjugation of their human partners.

Many scholars, theologians and demonologists, during the witch-hunt era, wrote exhaustively on the subject of the incubi and succubi. When you dip into these writings, it becomes apparent almost immediately that the antics of the incubi, or the boy members of the demon team, outnumber those of the succubi by an almost—to me at any rate—indecent degree. Actually, writers of the Middle Ages did little to hide their distrust of womanly virtue. They forthrightly assumed that women were naturally more licentious than men and therefore pushovers for psychic seduction.

Personally, I cannot resist the observation that all those medieval writers were men.

Apart from alleged witches, who were believed to be depraved anyway, the few men and many women who voluntarily reported on their sexual relations with these demons either led lonely and unfulfilled lives or were from the ranks of nuns and priests.

Why don't we hear more about these playmates today?

Is it possible that their activities are too tame for modern American taste?

Although the first Kinsey report, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male,* mirrored many of our sexual preferences, I first began to wonder about the American preoccupation with sex in 1966, long before I had ever heard of demon lovers. That was the year when Dr. William Masters and Virginia Johnson published the results of their eleven-year study of 382 women and 312 men (the women are ahead again!) in a laboratory setting. This book, *Human Sexual Responses,* was written as a scientific document and couched in that obstruse language. Yet it promptly hit the best-seller list. That is what surprised me. It also, or so I have been told, surprised Dr. Masters and Mrs. Johnson.

No prose, apparently, was academic enough to blunt

public passion for the authors' detailed descriptions of how they observed the female orgasm by means of a plastic penis lit from within in order to clinically record the phenomenon.

Since that time, although I am not implying a connection, underground newspapers have been springing up all over the country. In New York, the *East Village Other* began to provide their own "public service" by running classified ads so that sex partners of all persuasions could find each other through their columns. As for the display ads, French ticklers, stag movies (homosexual or heterosexual, AC or DC) became common offerings.

Then *Screw* hit the scene, as did the *New York Review of Sex.* Now, the *Screw* classified ads were simplicity themselves. They ran under the category "Cock and Pussy."

After *Screw* came *Kiss.* They skipped the ads altogether and got right down to business. Comic strips and photographs. Why the publishers opted to call it *Kiss,* I cannot fathom. Screwing, yes. Kissing, no.

These papers are frankly erotic. I only mention them now because, having read so many witch confessions, it struck me long ago that the witchcraft trials served very handily as pornographic literature for the Middle Ages.

But, alas, today's publishers have their fantasies, too. All their women are thin and all the men well hung.

Such honest admissions of sexual desire and overt solicitations for satisfaction may have reduced the demand for demons.

But they have not been completely driven from the scene.

Mack is a free-lance photographer (not for the underground press), and his various assignments now keep him traveling around the United States and Europe.

We had been in correspondence for many months and made a date for drinks at the Oak Room of the Plaza Hotel in New York when he came through town on his way back to Los Angeles from London.

"You'll recognize me, all right," Mack said when he called to set the date. "I'll be the big white-headed guy with

a red face wearing a blue turtleneck sweater and drinking a Gibson."

His description was accurate as far as it went. The gray was premature. The red face was not from the flush we associate with the heavy drinker, but rather, the thin-skinned blush pink that belongs to a redhead. Mack had obviously been one before the white took over.

He had secured a corner table for two and when I walked toward him, he stood up to greet me with a hearty "Blessed Be."

I had long since grown accustomed to seeing the phrase as a signoff to his letters. I was not quite prepared to hear it delivered so naturally and warmly in person. There was no trace of the unctuous in his tone of voice. Somehow, he made those two words sound like a personal bond.

When we were settled and while he busied himself giving orders to the waiter ("another Gibson for me, a scotch and water for the lady"), I recalled mentally that in my last letter to Mack I had mentioned my studies concerning the incubi and succubi. I had told him I hoped to track down personal stories on the subject from witches. Now I considered my approach. How could I pursue this possibility—or impossibility—with Mack? What would be the most tactful way to go about it?

I needn't have bothered. When the waiter served the drinks and left, Mack just turned toward me, slouched deeper in his chair and casually asked:

"Well, Susan, so you want to know about phantom fucking?"

"Well, yes. Is there such a thing, Mack?"

"You'd better believe it," he answered with no hesitation at all. "See this?" he asked. With that he sat up straighter, tugged at the collar of his turtleneck sweater and pulled out a deep blue chalcedony stone, formed like a scorpion. It was simply set in silver prongs and hung on a silver chain.

"This is my protection against Martha," he said.

He told me that he bought the stone two years before when he was initiated into a coven on the West Coast. He flatly refused to allow me to use his full name or to identify their location any more closely than I have here.

"Personally, I don't care. I make no bones whatsoever about being a witch. But we've had some rotten publicity thanks to those tatty Satanists in California and I have to protect the others in my coven," he explained.

He told me that the stone had been charmed by the members of his coven for one purpose only: to protect him against the seductions of a succubus. He said that he wore the charm all the time.

Mack explained that when he was in his senior year at UCLA, he had been engaged to Martha, a fashion artist, and that she committed suicide two weeks before the wedding.

To this day, he claims, he has no idea why she took her own life.

"This was no case of an overdose of sleeping pills that could have been an accident. She hung herself from the rafter of her studio apartment and left a two-word note. 'I'm sorry' is all she wrote," Mack said.

"We were happy—or so I thought. It cracked me up for a long time. For the next four or five years I wrapped myself up in photography, and what started out as a hobby became my profession. I'm curious about many things, witchcraft included—so, to make a long story short, I got the bid to do some work for a movie outfit in England, and while I was there I got hooked on the Old Religion."

He said that he got in touch with the Witchcraft Association in England and started reading the newsletter called the *Pentagram*.

He paused while he fished out the onion from his drink and then added casually:

"That's when Martha came back—as a succubus."

That was two years ago. Mack said that she followed him from London to Los Angeles, appearing six times within one month.

"The first time was merely spooky. The other five were sheer hell because I knew what—if you'll pardon the expression—was coming."

Mack said that she appeared that first time about three years before when he was staying in a small hotel off Earl's Court in London.

"It's the sort of dotty little place the English adore, com-

fortable and anonymous, which is what I wanted at the time. We'd had a rough day shooting inside stills. The weather was a real English production, wet and heavy. I was tired, so after a few beers in the house pub, I went on up to bed and fell asleep with no trouble at all.

"I woke up about three or four hours later—there was no particular sound or noise. The rain had stopped and the whole house was in a dead silence. I saw nothing, I heard nothing. I had been sleeping on my right side, as I always do, with my face to the wall.

"Very, very gradually, only half awake, an old familiar scent crept into the room. At first I couldn't place it and then it began to fog up the conscious part of my mind and I knew that it was, of all things, 'Tabu'!"

Mack laughed then and interrupted his story long enough to ask, "Do girls wear 'Tabu' any more?"

"I don't know," I answered. "I never did. The scent was always much too heavy for me, but, yes, it was very popular at one time and may still be for all I know."

"Not with me," he said. "Not with me now."

He said that Martha had worn it all the time and he still associated it with her. "That should have tipped me right then and there," he added. "You know, Susan, when a spirit appears to you, the form is not necessarily important. They usually manage to bring a scent, a phrase, something peculiar to their own identity. That is so you will be certain to recognize them. But—well, I was still half out of it, so I didn't react. Mentally, that is."

"But physically?"

"Damn right. By then I was fully conscious. I had some vague half-thoughts like, 'What's Martha doing here?' then, 'How great!' and, instinctively, as I must have done a hundred times before, I didn't even turn over. I just reached out in that lazy way to caress her and pull her into bed."

Mack finished his drink in one gulp. His face flushed, the sure clue to an emotional reaction of a born redhead. Whether it was from memory or the sudden jolt of gin, I'm not quite sure.

"You know," he said, "don't let us kid you. In the dark you're *not* all the same. When I reached out and felt that warm soft flesh—that was pure Martha. No one else. All

lovers have their own peculiar little bed secrets with each other as I'm sure you must know. My reactions then were sheer gut memory. I ran my hand up her leg to pat that sweet little behind."

Mack shuddered. He ordered another round of drinks.

While we waited, he lit a Gauloise and muttered, "Lousy habit I picked up abroad," and then added softly, more to himself than to me, "That sweet little behind just wasn't there.

"Do you want to know what a succubus is like—really like?" He was brisker now.

"Yes, of course I do, Mack."

"As for looks, I don't know, thank God. I can only tell you that when I moved my hand up her leg it just kept going up and up and up, like caressing a long fleshy tube. What saved me—except habit—from turning over and opening my arms to embrace her—or it—I'll never know."

The new round of drinks arrived and this time we both took a healthy belt.

"I closed my eyes and yelled like hell," Mack continued. "That brought the man in the next room running and pounding on the door, certain I was being murdered. Of course, when I jumped up and turned on the lights, no one was there. I assured him I'd had a nightmare and let it go at that."

Once he had candidly told me about his personal experience with Martha, he relaxed and became more objective. He told me that the other five experiences were exactly the same—three in New York and two more after he had arrived back on the West Coast.

He never did see her. He believes that he was aroused before she had summoned enough energy to fully materialize in human form. He still puzzles over the timing of her appearance and says that on each occasion he had combined a few beers with overwork. Why she has—or had—chosen to appear at all is pure speculation.

He believes there is some connection between her suicide and her reappearance in his life in an intimacy usually associated with marriage just at the time that he was, himself, preparing to embrace witchcraft.

"When I got back to the Coast and discovered I couldn't

shake her, that's when I bought the chalcedony. She hasn't returned since. I'm immune to her seductions now—and seductive she was. One whiff of that perfume and—whang! —instant hard! And instant hell!"

Mack was one of those thirteen men and women robed and cowled in white velvet when the witches met in California to release their cone of power. Their purpose? To charm the chalcedony.

11. Hell on Earth

In magic, one uses the four elements—earth, air, fire and water—plus a fifth element which is sometimes called *akasha*. This is the life force.

The astral plane is not created of the four elements but rather is a manifestation of the *akasha principle*. Witches therefore say that everything in the material world which has happened, is happening and will happen has its origins, regulations and existence in the astral.

It is believed that there are seven astral planes. They are as distinct as the colors in the spectrum. This does not mean that they are layered like the tiers of a cake, but that each plane has its own dimension.

The lowest of these, the first, is called by many names. It is the world of the nightmare, the gross, the paranoiac, or, simply, hell. It's the only one I'll take up at this time.

Joe Lukach calls it the plane where all the astral garbage is swept.

No matter the name given to it, this is the plane in which, he explained, disembodied subhuman life thrives in an astral cesspool, awaiting only the imagination of man to materialize their forms into matter.

He puts it this way:

• It is to this lower plane that the black magician deliberately directs his powers to call forth the forces of evil, or demons. But rummaging about in this spiritual cistern is not an exclusive privilege granted to the black magician. Any one can tap it, knowingly or not.

• It is from this plane that the alcoholic dredges out his personal demons and calls them delirium tremors.

• It is on this plane that the drug addict battles his personal "demons from hell."

• This plane, like the other six higher ones, is quite real and the mind of man can plug into it.

Nor, does it seem, do astral rejects nibble away only at the alcoholic or drug addict whose natural protective sheaths have already been eaten away by their excesses and rendered them easy prey through their psychic nakedness.

Witches agree that a very active guerrilla warfare is constantly being waged between these demons and those—such as themselves—who are deliberately committed to the psychic struggle against them.

It is a popular belief that demons have no power over a person unless that person himself allows it.

Witches say this is not entirely true. Most of us, fortunately, *are* protected by our incapacity to perceive demonic powers. Witches, of course, often venture out to meet invisible forces and can just as easily encounter malignant as benign ones. They have learned—often the hard way—how to protect themselves against demons.

Aleister Crowley himself tells us in his *Confessions,* and he, of all people, should know, "The demons connected with *Abramelin* do not wait to be invoked, they come unsought."

I can only say from my own personal experience that I wish I had read this passage from the *Confessions* before I picked up a copy of *Abramelin the Mage.* If I had, I would have sought out a special protection from a witch. This did not occur to me, however.

For several nights after I had finished reading this book, I experienced terrifying nightmares, a rare experience for me. I would awaken, in a cold sweat, suffocating, fighting for breath, hearing only the pounding of my heart and struggling frantically to regain consciousness. I never retained a visual memory of the dream itself, but the panic stayed with me a long time. My witch friends interpret those nightmares as an early manifestation of a psychic attack by evil forces, activated by my reading of *Abramelin.*

Such skirmishes, they say, are fought every day—and night.

Joe, because he, like others, does not doubt for one minute that the extraordinarily popular *Rosemary's Baby* contained as much fact as fiction, is willing to support his belief by telling about some of his personal experiences with these astral gangsters.

One such story concerns a highly gifted New York medium who consulted him as a friend.

"She was very agitated as she described an experience she had one night after conducting a seance," Joe told me.

She said that after her guests had gone and she was alone in her house, she puttered around in her regular routine and then went on to bed. In a half-awake state, she suddenly became frighteningly aware of very strange, strong and unexplainable sexual sensations. At the same time, she became virtually immobilized, unable to move her arms or legs.

"She told me," Joe continued, "that she felt 'overpowered.' These weird sensations passed very quickly, and the next morning, when she woke up, she was physically sore and emotionally scared.

She skipped one menstrual period—then the second. Then she called Joe.

"She was grim about it," he said. "She told me that she was certain she was carrying a demon's child and she refused to become the mother of some infernal creation," he went on.

To a witch, there is nothing in the least unusual about such a story. Among themselves, they will discuss psychic abortions quite freely. Rarely will they do so for publication. When Joe agreed to, he insisted that I make two points crystal clear.

• Witches do *not* usually believe in interfering with pregnancy. They do believe in reincarnation. It then follows that—to them—destruction of potential life could be harmful to the soul progress of the woman who carries the embryo.

• When bizarre circumstances indicate that a demon may be born into human form, they do not resort to the use of herbs or drugs. Instead they seek psychic guidance and help.

The demon in human form is a rarity. Witches say they

can usually be recognized, even by a nonpsychic. Most of us, after all, have met someone, sometime, who, for some reason or another, we've found to be utterly despicable. "He's just not human," we'll say. Witches tell me this may not be just a figure of speech.

I'm told that in appearance, a demon may be handsome or ugly, or nondescript.

"They radiate malignance," Joe said, "just like a bulb radiates light. Sometimes it's subtle. Sometimes blatant. But they have a destructive effect on everyone about them."

Fortunately, he added, the human body is not designed to harbor such a mordant entity for any length of time, and so the life of a demon on the earth plane is usually short.

"In this woman's case," Joe said, "I agreed to join my forces with hers and work for an abortion. We met in my apartment one night and together asked for help from our guides."

Since Joe, when in the trance state, has no waking memory of the experience, his friend supplied him with the details later.

"She told me that after I went under and was in contact with Edan—you've met him—he spoke with her briefly about her problem and then passed her on to a higher level.

"That spirit then told my friend to repeat a certain incantation," Joe said. "I discovered later that the words he used were completely unknown to me, as they were to her. She followed his instructions to the letter. And, that's all there was to it. Two days later she called and said she had passed several large clots of blood and that her normal period had resumed."

Joe will sometimes discuss his own terrifying personal bouts with the demon world.

"Time and again, I have been bodily thrown from bed. I have had bruises and scars to show for it," he told me. He can talk as casually about such experiences as if he were telling you what he had cooked for dinner.

"Did I ever tell you about the time I met a demon on the astral plane when I was drifting off to sleep one night?" he asked. As a matter of fact, we had just finished dinner and were sitting around drinking coffee when he brought the subject up.

"Tell me now," I prompted.

"He appeared in human shape. He came at me screaming. At first, I couldn't make out what he was saying. I finally understood that he was trying to convince me that it was wrong for me to use my powers in the practice of white magic. He cursed vividly." Joe grinned broadly at the memory.

"And the words?"

"The same old four-letter ones we all know." Now he was laughing. "Apparently, there is nothing new to be learned from Hell on that score."

"What else did he tell you?"

"That I was a fool. That praying to God was a waste of time, since there was no such benevolent force. That I could get fame, power or money only through black magic. By this time, it was pretty obvious to him that I wasn't going to pay any serious attention to his ravings. So then he began to insist that even if there were good forces in the Universe, they would never come to my aid when I needed them. Like right then."

I had read about astral attacks. This was the first chance I had to hear about one first hand. My nightmares soon seemed tame by comparison.

"What happened?" I asked.

By that time, Joe said, he got up from bed and they stood facing each other in the middle of the room.

"He grew so frenzied at this point," Joe continued, "that in a flash, he changed into animal form. He jumped at me and clawed at my back. I batted him down and began praying for my own forces to come and help me. This made him madder. He had fallen back at my feet and sat there on his haunches, gibbering, again calling me a fool—an idiot. We couldn't have been like that for more than a few seconds. Then suddenly it came—not him, but my own forces. I could feel them surging through me. Like a charge. . . ."

"And the demon?"

"My hand automatically pointed straight down at him in a sign which I don't remember to this good day. Immediately, he was struck by a bolt and burned away in a great yellow flame into nothing in front of my eyes, still screaming."

It was not until the next morning, Joe said, when he was in front of the bathroom mirror combing his hair that he noticed the claw marks on his shoulder.

"I turned around and looked at my back and saw how far down they went. They ran from the rib cage clear up and over the left shoulder," he said.

Joe, who keeps his nails chewed to the quick, quite obviously would not be able to self-inflict any such marks as he described even if he could reach that far down on his back.

He bounced to his feet and tried to demonstrate.

"There were four long scratches. Started down here." He put his hand behind his back and pointed in the general area of the middle of his spine. Then he sat down again.

"They ran straight up and over my left shoulder, like I said. But there was something so strange about them that I finally decided to see a dermatologist to find out if they should be treated in some way. I did not," he added wryly, "tell him how I got them."

"What did he do?"

"Nothing, really. There was nothing to treat. You see, the skin had not been broken at all. Here were those four long, vicious scratches clear across my back and shoulder in one clean sweep. But the skin wasn't broken."

"Did they look like welts?"

"Not in the least. They were simply scratches covered by unbroken skin. The doctor was so puzzled, he even examined them under a magnifying glass, just to be certain," he added.

"Didn't he ask you how you had gotten them?"

"Oh, sure. But I didn't know him well enough to tell him the truth, so I rather led him to believe I just didn't remember. I guess he thought the usual—that the Good Lord takes care of fools and drunks. At least he gave me that kind of look when I left," he said.

Joe said they weren't particularly painful and that they faded away in a few days.

I would have been scared silly, and said so.

"Well, I'm not going to tell you that you get used to such experiences. But you do have to remember that I

am more or less accustomed to seeing—and hearing—things from another plane. You aren't."

Joseph Wilson has had his problems in this area, too.

"In December of 1967," he recalls, "I spent ten days in the Los Angeles area, and while I was there, I met a black magician who, I believe, has been causing a lot of trouble for a lot of people for a long time," he said.

"Ellen is a heavy woman, nearly two hundred pounds, standing a little more than five feet. She has brown hair and her eyes are either gray or green—I'm somewhat colorblind. At any rate, she is not the type of person that a man would go out of his way to seduce."

Joseph thought that one over for a couple of seconds and then faked a shiver of his shoulders.

"Nope," he commented. "To get right down to it, the normal male reaction is one of revulsion." Joseph looked at me quizzically.

"But, would you believe it, Ellen is able to get nearly anyone—male *or* female—into bed with her. I won't pretend to be a psychiatrist and say why she does this or even *why* she wants to do this. That's not important."

What Joseph considers important is the fact that she performs this feat by preparing a meal for her intended victim. He said that if she cannot manage to fix a meal, a cup of coffee will do. Within 24 hours after eating the meal or drinking the coffee, the person's thoughts are drawn to her and the victim does whatever she or he can to come to her bed. He does not know what potions or spells she actually uses to get results.

"She tried this on me when I was there. Since I knew about her reputation in advance, I was able to neutralize her spell by merely turning down her hospitality when refreshment time came," he said.

He says he must have made her mad, although he was not aware of it at the time.

"But shortly after I got back to Topeka, things began to happen. Some of my old, solid friendships began to go sour for no reason. I began losing money—which I cannot afford. Little things—dumb things. And I walked around tired most of the time, no matter how much sleep I got. I

finally got the message through my bald head. I was under psychic attack."

Joseph said he then took countermeasures, but it was several months before he could battle the attack to a stalemate.

"I did it through astral projection," he explained.

This is a term which crops up repeatedly with witches. Joseph explains it like this:

"The astral body is composed of matter, just as the physical body is, except that the texture is extremely fine. You can't see it. Now, during our physical life many men and women—not only witches—can and do release this body and temporarily inhabit the astral plane. You can learn to do it at will. You can send your astral body anywhere you want it to go—instantly. With most people, this happens during sleep."

Joseph went on to tell me that he hesitates to deliberately release his own astral body. He says that he does not find the experience unpleasant. But he says that when he projects he is somewhat uncomfortable about what stray soul might decide to inhabit his physical body while he is gone.

Nevertheless, he decided to take an astral trip.

"I don't believe Ellen's power is—or was—all her own. In my own search, I found traces of either a group, or an extremely strong entity which, for reasons still unknown to me, seems compelled to break up white magic groups and cause them personal misery. I believe that such a power was being channeled through Ellen for this purpose. I'm not even sure she is aware that she is being used in this manner."

Once he was convinced that it was indeed Ellen—or her cohorts—who were giving him a bad time, Joseph set up protective measures against the attack. Witches have different ways of doing this, he said, and since they all have their own favorite methods, there is no one-way formula. In this instance, he said, he and other members of his coven set up a "magic shield"—a psychic barrier—around the Wilson family.

Since it was done through a coven ritual, precisely what they did is their own secret. After that, Joseph said, the attacks faded away.

"But, unfortunately, such a shield works both ways. It has also prevented me from checking up on her any further," he added.

Witches, when they talk of their magic, frequently refer to "the return blow." When I first heard the term, I immediately thought of tit for tat. I was to learn this is not what they mean at all.

While I was in Cincinnati, "The Bills" were discussing another witch they both know. According to Bill Janney, she'd called him long distance a few days before to find out how a local election had come out.

"When I told her, she let out a wail. 'It can't be. It can't be. Why, he couldn't have won. I fixed him good.' To that, I could only say, 'Sweetie, either whistle up a cat or start moving. The return blow is on its way.' "

Bill Saffin spoke up. "Susan, any magician worth his salt"—there was a twinkle in his eyes at the allusion—"knows that if you send out a whammy you include a secondary target in the curse. An animal, for example, will be delegated to absorb the blow and dispel it in the event the curse misfires and misses the prime target. In that way, it cannot boomerang and hit the magician."

And what happens to the animal?

"It dies," he said simply.

Today, this seems to be the major function of the witch "familiar"—to provide protection.

I have already said that Charles is a witch and a physician. Except to describe himself as middle-aged, he refuses to reveal his identity further since he does not intend to incur the official wrath of the American Medical Association or his local medical society. Some of his colleagues, he said, know of his interest in witchcraft and magic but assume that it is merely an oddball hobby of his.

He frankly suspects some psychoanalysts of knowing more about the power of magic than they are willing to admit when, in his opinion, they go beyond the bounds of offering help but seek domination over the lives of their patients as well.

Joe Lukach had made it clear to me that witches do not allow, much less encourage, others to use them as a crutch.

"When we feel that they do, then we dismiss them for their own good," he told me.

With that thought in the back of my mind, I asked Charles what he meant about psychoanalysts, and domination.

"Haven't you ever met a man or woman in analysis who told you that the reason they weren't making a new marriage or forming a new relationship—*meaningful* relationship is the usual term—until their analyst gave them the go-ahead?"

"Well, yes," I admitted.

"As a matter of fact, whenever you meet someone who is in analysis, it's pretty hard to avoid discussing it, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Then I would say that the power of analysis emanates from doctor to patient right on through to the casual bystander. And the patient is in the middle, immobilized, waiting for the approval of the analyst."

"Charles, I take it that you don't like analysts."

"Quite the contrary. Your statement is much too broad. Actually some of them I like rather well. What I am saying is that they have, some of them, a God complex—as if they were trying in some way to form their own religion, through their authority, or power, or magic. Call it what you will."

Charles went on to explain that he did not want to give me, or anyone else, the impression that he condemned the entire profession. In fact, he cited the exploration into the subject of reincarnation by Dr. Ian Stevenson, Alumni Professor of Psychiatry at the University School of Medicine at Virginia, as an example of the growing interest on the part of the medical profession into occult subjects.

"Now let me make another point clear," he said. "My skepticism is no secret. Remember one thing. I work under two disciplines. One, scientific. Two, occult. And whenever I see a desire for power, my suspicions go on the alert on both counts."

Then Charles settled down to telling me of an experience he had which, as far as he is concerned, confirmed his suspicions about one such analyst.

"There was this cocktail party in Boston," he said. "I'm there as a medical man, not a 'witch doctor.' We had reached the stage where we were splitting off into little groups, like all affairs eventually do, just about the time when you know the hostess wishes you would leave and the guests who are left haven't quite made up their minds what to do with the rest of the evening.

"Been to one of those?" he asked unexpectedly, shooting the question at me like a dart.

"Sure."

"Then you know." That point made, he went on with his story.

"Well, by that time, I found myself standing around with a few other leftovers. We were down to rattling the ice in our glasses. I was just about to put mine down and take off when suddenly, one of the men asked if any of us had read a recent article in the literature about zoophily and zooerasty. Now, Susan, those are two terms which have come into medical literature by way of Krafft-Ebing. In general, they mean the use of domestic animals for sexual arousal."

Charles said that what happened next was a form of herd instinct. "I headed promptly for the bar, got a new drink. The others followed right behind as if they had been led by a rope. Then we settled to it.

"Now I had read that article. We all had. That's why we formed this little vortex and discussed it. From my point of view, the article was well documented and well presented, including the case histories of some pretty sick—if not insane—people. The sort who get their kicks out of pumping air into the rectum of a cat with a bicycle pump. Or by screwing a stallion who has mounted a mare. That kind of sickness."

Sickness! That kind of sex can be suicidal!

Charles told me that his exception to the article was one statement which the author made when he lumped witchcraft and Satanism together and stated that animals play a sexual role in these cults.

"That's where the battle began," he said.

Charles said that one of the analysts present disagreed with him so vehemently on what he had regarded as a casual criticism on his part, that he quickly began to wonder why.

"I toyed at once with the idea that he probably dabbled in black magic himself, and since he was slightly smashed anyway, couldn't resist an oblique defense of his private practices—whatever they are. At any rate, what happened to me later on only confirmed my suspicions."

Charles told me that he woke up later that night—alone—to the sound of heavy, hard breathing in his bedroom and that indefinable, clammy feeling that announces unseen danger.

"This was not an amplified sound—you couldn't even call it an exaggerated pant. It was, quite simply, the normal sound you might expect a giant to make in ordinary breathing. If," he added, "you might ever expect to hear a giant breathe."

For a moment or two, he said, he held his own breath, hoping against hope that it was his own he was hearing. Certain at last that it was not, he controlled his panic and, on shaky legs, got out of bed and began a counterincantation for protection.

"The first move is a physical gesture with the fingers of the right hand. For one paralyzing moment, I couldn't even move my fingers. They were cramped shut. I forced them open with my left hand, made the secret sign and very slowly began the short protective chant."

Witches rarely give details of such protective devices, largely because there are almost endless varieties and combinations. In addition, they firmly believe that, misused, they can backfire. I don't know what words Charles used. My guess would be that he improvised to suit the occasion, just as a chef will vary seasonings to personal taste.

The gesture, however, is one which is called the witches' "banishing pentagram." In this, the index and third fingers of the right hand are extended. The fourth and fifth fingers are bent toward the palm, their nails covered by the thumb. The extended fingers in turn touch the left breast, forehead, right breast, left shoulder and right shoulder, and then return to left breast to form the pentagram.

Charles said that as soon as he managed to complete the banishing sign, the breathing which had so profoundly disturbed him abruptly stopped. At no time did he see anyone or anything.

"Sounds which are pitched to a key which the human ear cannot accommodate can also destroy by their very vibrations," he went on. "As soon as I rid myself of the sound, my fears vanished, and in a few minutes, I was able to go back to bed and to sleep."

Charles said that the next morning when he woke up, he went into the living room with a cup of coffee and walked over to the bird cage to start the day by saying good morning to his two prize Java finches.

"When I approached the cage, I was horrified to find that not one, but both birds were stone cold dead. Not only that, they were lying on their backs at the bottom of the cage, tail to tail, with their little feet clasped together."

I agreed it sounded peculiar.

"Both were in perfect health the night before. Even so, one bird you might expect to drop dead, maybe. But two? Plonk on their backs? At the same time? Clasping their little hands, so to speak? No." Charles shook his head emphatically.

"No," he repeated, "the mathematical odds are against it. They are astronomical in fact. And their death positions were unbelievable."

He believes, of course, that his finches were the victim of a curse against him which had misfired. The return blow—short-circuited.

There is no question in my mind about the sincerity and conviction of Mack, Charles, Joe Lukach and Joseph Wilson when they freely discussed their personal confrontations with the horrors of what they call the lower astral plane.

In each case, they made it quite clear that they had been attacked from that level, understood why and com-

bated the attack with all the counterforces they could muster.

Other witches have offered their insights into the workings of black magic but declined to offer more than rumor or gossip for fear of psychic retaliation that they feel they may, or may not, be able to handle. They do not wish to take the chance. As long as I agreed that their random information would be swept into an anonymous composite, they were willing enough to talk. I have not disguised the names of the cities.

In current circulation via the witchcraft grapevine are stories of a loosely organized group of black magicians in the Cincinnati area. Pierced sheep's hearts have been found in public parks.

This would suggest animal sacrifice, considered particularly dangerous by witches not only because of the implication of the blood rituals being performed, but also because the use of a public park indicates the intent to curse an entire community, not just an individual. "The Bills," of course, passed on this information to me.

In Cleveland, witches there have assured me, there is a long-established loosely organized group of at least 200 who are devotees of the black arts, and initiation into this group requires blood sacrifice.

One young woman, who has since left the area, told me that while animals, usually chickens, are used, sheep and goats are preferred. She said that she herself had been accepted on probation by offering up a toad. She insisted that she had no real conception of what she was getting into. Then an older woman in the group confided to her that she had sacrificed her newborn baby.

I asked her if she really believed that story. She told me that she didn't stick around long enough to find out one way or the other. True or not, she promptly concluded that the woman was crazy and she wanted no part of it.

On the Eastern seaboard, tales of the active practice of black magic on Cape Cod have been creeping through the witchcraft underground for more than three years. Tracing them to their source is a nebulous business at best. Hard-core evidence, so far, is too fragmentary to report.

It is very much like tracing the progression of a virus through the human body. Now it's in the stomach, now the ear, now the sinus, now the chest, now the intestines and back to the stomach again. Such rumors do not run their course easily. And they also, like a virus, seem to mutate. Once you think you have killed such a rumor, it slithers around and reemerges, as immune and elusive as ever.

It is the very persistence of these rumors that finally persuaded me that, while they cannot be documented, neither can they go unnoted.

There are two rumors that I chased from community to community on the Cape like an echo virus: one, that a group of black magicians succeeded in holding a black mass in a Church; the other, that they desecrated a graveyard as well. Are either of them true? Is there a connection between them?

I pursued both through Provincetown, Wellfleet, Hyannisport and Brewster (the most commonly mentioned points of origin) and failed to pin down any facts. Several ministers in this area are also aware of these rumors. One confided that although he has no firm evidence of the practice of black magic in his parish, he is already reading up on the Church literature in order to prepare himself to perform the rites of exorcism if it should become necessary. He also pointed out that such recurrent rumors can be almost as disturbing as the actual acts of sorcery themselves.

Six months after I abandoned my investigations into these rumors, the nude and mutilated bodies of four young women were discovered in shallow graves in Truro on Cape Cod, which is near Provincetown.

Their hearts had been cut out.

Witches can describe some of the symptoms which might indicate the black magician at work. They also know how to protect themselves.

But what of the rest of us? What can we do? Hire Nixon, Mudge, Rose, Guthrie and Alexander to file legal suit?

Obviously, the first course to take if you suspect a

psychic attack is to seek the aid of a witch who can counteract the curse. This, of course, is not always possible.

I was lucky.

Looking back, I can only conclude that either I had developed an overactive imagination while delving into this subject or I had inadvertently sideswiped a black magician. I had already suffered through a series of nightmares after reading *Abramelin the Mage.*

For the record, I must in all fairness say that my cadre of witches scattered across country never lost an opportunity to warn me that I must keep personally alert to the danger of a direct astral attack.

One common thread ran through their individual warnings: even if I offended no one, my very absorption in the subject might, of itself, attract evil forces.

I was up late one night, sorting out notes for this particular chapter. Nothing in that evening differed in any special way from many others I had spent. Satisfied at last that I could do no more for the time being, I put the notes aside, went to bed and, quite easily, drifted off to sleep. The memory of those earlier nightmares had faded.

What awakened me, I do not know. I was vaguely aware of a strange soreness in my throat. I swallowed a few times. The pain was definitely there, yet my throat did not seem scratchy. I felt along the side of my jaw—no swollen glands. The pain persisted and grew more acute. By this time I was fully awake. Automatically, I reached for the bedside light, then changed my mind. I sat up in the dark and, coolly as I could, began to consider the pain deliberately and objectively in an effort to isolate and trace it. Within a few minutes, it localized. I have had my share of sinus infections, strep throats and headaches.

This resembled none of them. It was unique. It felt exactly as if a long thin nail was burning its way in a straight line from the inside of the bridge of my nose down through my throat and into the larynx. Suddenly the pain flashed so swiftly and relentlessly that I almost screamed.

Quickly I turned on the light. It was three in the morning. Shaken, I got up and went to the bathroom, turned on the light and looked in the mirror. The pain was subsiding. Then I hollered to my daughter Susan.

When she came running, I simply asked—although croaked would be a more accurate word—as casually as I could manage:

"Susie, do you see anything unusual?"

"Mother! What happened? Who tried to strangle you?"

Susie was even more shocked and alarmed than I. She, too, saw the angry red welts around my neck and the hard white lump which had formed near the base of my larynx.

After I reassured her that no intruder lurked under my bed, together we went into the living room while I phoned Joe Lukach. He didn't seem particularly surprised to hear from me at such an odd hour. He merely told me to put the whole episode out of my mind completely and go on back to bed. He said that, from his side of town, he would immediately send out a protective spell to destroy whatever angry astral body was attacking me.

To this day, I haven't the slightest idea what spell he cast. I only know that in a surprisingly short time, I was fast asleep again. There was some slight residual damage. For the next day or so I wore a scarf around my neck while the red marks gradually subsided.

The morning after this episode, Joe came over with a bottle of crimson liquid. He asked for open, wide-necked containers. The closest I had to offer were champagne glasses. He said they would do nicely and, with that, he filled several to the brim and placed one in each room of the apartment.

"What is it?" I asked. I sniffed. It had no odor.

"Never mind that," he answered. "It's guaranteed to give a psychic hotfoot to any wandering astral body who is up to no good. You're perfectly safe from psychic attack now."

Although I didn't see Joe cast a spell or mix a protective potion on my behalf then, I did watch him at work when he did a similar favor for another friend.

Joe was the witch who filled up the little brown bottle,

stuffed it with names of people written on slips of paper and issued instructions that a black candle be burned for fifteen minutes a day.

That technique was entirely different from the one he used on me, he said. Why?

"So was his problem," Joe said. "Witch charms are made to order. Over-the-counter charms might work in some instances—if the person who buys them knows how to charge them magnetically. Other than that, they are merely charming.

"Now, in the case of the 'little brown bottle,' the man you met when I prepared the charm to order wanted to know which one of fifteen possible employees of his firm was stealing. That's far more complex than a 'good-luck talisman.' He simply didn't have a clue. He only knew it had to stop. So, he asked me to find out, and I did—through magic."

I asked Joe what happened when the black candle eventually burned down.

"One of his drivers broke an arm. The next day."

"Was he the guilty one? Or was it just a coincidence?"

"Aren't you getting bored with that word by now," Joe shot back. Then he smiled. "The stealing stopped—immediately."

12. Magical Mishaps

The astral plane, in addition to extending beyond time and space, has various types of inhabitants. Beings of the four pure elements are to be found in the astral: salamanders of the fire element, sylphids or gremlins of the air element, mermaids or undines of the water element and gnomes of the earth element are a few. Inhabitants of the astral plane seldom seem to encounter other types of inhabitants because their vibrations differ.

Elementals usually have little in common with humanity, yet at times—through ritual or chance or an emotional and subconscious "call"—their paths can cross with ours. Usually this is in some remote and lonely place and for only a short time. In such a case, an ordinary person would merely sense a "presence" and a feeling of awe, intrigue or perhaps fear. A psychically sensitive person would see an unusual, dynamic and perilously charming "person" and might even strike up a conversation. The elemental might appear as an animal or a mythical creature of high intelligence.

Ed Fitch says that he has contacted elementals through ceremonial magic. Since contacts with such spirits are said to carry another ingredient—danger—why would anyone want to seek such meetings?

That was the first question I posed for Ed when he told me of his interest. He had a ready answer.

"There's not much left to explore in this world anymore," he said, "so I like to go out into another dimension and meet new beings, in spite of the risk. It's exciting."

Ed just doesn't look like the kind of guy who would deliberately flirt with danger. I would much rather expect

to see his face smiling at me from the pages of *The New York Times* in a Brooks Brothers ad, instead of at the other end of a ceremonial sword. I said as much.

"Oh, it's not danger I'm courting for kicks, Susan," he hastened to explain.

"But elementals are stimulating. You see, an elemental pours out all its vitality from the one element to which it belongs. It's highly concentrated since it's the only force it has. And, after all, elementals can, if they want to, do little jobs for human beings."

"Like what?"

"Gremlins. You know what they are."

I've heard of gremlins, of course. Later, after Ed and I had ended this particular conversation, I looked the word up in the dictionary to see what, if any, definition was carried there. It defined a gremlin as an imaginary elf that troubles the pilots of airplanes.

Ed told me that gremlins are air elementals, and that while they can often mean trouble, they also have been known to hold up the wings of planes during storms to keep them from crashing.

While I understood that it was risky for mortals to delve into the elemental kingdom, I didn't know quite what risks were involved.

Ed told me that such excursions could lead to mental unbalance or obsession, and then plunged right in to tell me about a jam he got into when he first began to experiment.

"It was in February of 1966," he began. "I'll never forget that date, ever. The moon was full. I was living in D.C. That night, I dropped off some documents at a motel on the Potomac River for the company I was working for at the time. The river was lovely. Oddly enough, the night was warm.

"Then I headed back to my basement apartment. Medieval European. Wood-burning fireplace. Antiques. Old prints on the wall. A perfect place for practicing rituals.

"So, I stoked up the fire, went through a preliminary ritual, drew in my power. Then I got out my sword, wrapped it up in white cloth and set out to walk to the park. The streets were empty. It was deathly quiet. I went striding along and when I got to the last lights on the

block—just before I entered the park—I called forth my helper (another nonmaterial being) and posted him on my left side."

Ed's narrative was clipping right along now, his intensity mounting with each phrase.

"We walked on together. He kept one step to my rear, on the left. There was still no one else around, so, using the sword, I made my invocation to the Goddess. And walked on. Except now there were other footsteps behind me. To my right.

"I quickened my pace. My friend was still walking to my left. But two strangers were padding along to my right. By now we were in the park. I used every occult technique I could hang a thought onto. I knew I had done something wrong. By now I knew I had brought in a pair of very archaic elementals by mistake. And they were curious to witness—and partake of a blood sacrifice. Two things flashed through my mind: One, 'I'm it.' The other, 'What do I do now?'

"I knew if I made a run for it, I'd never make it to the first street light—physically or mentally or emotionally. Along about that time, I began to feel like a character out of Edgar Allan Poe.

"So, I made another quick invocation to the Goddess. 'Work with me. Work with me,' I kept saying over and over again, silently. To the hungry beings beside me I ordered, 'You are in the service of the Lady. In Her name, work with me!' The truth is, I didn't know *what* to do. So I picked out an area under a huge oak tree and drew a triple circle clockwise with my sword and stepped into the middle. Those footsteps came right up to the edge, but they didn't enter the circle. I never did see them. I heard them plainly—breathing. And while I was in that circle, I shut down the magical equipment. I cut off that ritual, as best I could. When I got the strength back in my knees, I walked out."

Ed stopped abruptly. He had run out of breath himself. I took advantage of the pause to break the tension he had built up through reliving the experience by remarking, "Well, you got out of that one safely."

"Ah, so." He picked up the story again. "But no."

He said that the next day he was on edge and by night, he was worse—jumpier than a cat.

"For the first time in my entire life, I slept with the light on," he said.

Nor were things any better the following day. He said that he used every technique he knew to seal off his apartment psychically.

"But it didn't work. At least not well enough. I began to get the feeling that I was walking a high fence, and my balance was extremely precarious. I was going through my days and nights held up by own ability to balance—or else."

"But," I interrupted, "hadn't you cut off the ritual?"

Again he did not hesitate to respond.

"I hadn't done it properly, and I didn't know how to. The truth is, if I'd known what I was doing in the first place, I wouldn't have wound up in such a mess. I had unwittingly unleashed some nature spirits which were out of my control. I had summoned them, all right. And at least they weren't breathing down my neck anymore. But I just didn't know how to dismiss them completely. So there I was, hanging on for dear life."

"How did you pull out of it?"

"I phoned a friend who knew more than I did and cried for help."

Harold puts such pleas—he says they are well known to witches—under the general category of the "fire brigade." He says any ceremonial magician will always answer such a call for help at any hour—day or night—from another one.

"So how would you find one in an emergency?" I asked Harold.

"Well, in the first place, ceremonial magicians do not work in a vacuum. They will always *know* another one."

I repeated that conversation to Ed and he agreed wholeheartedly.

"Harold is right. And I knew someone who could help. We spent about three hours working together and she pulled me out that very night."

I couldn't understand why he waited several days for help.

"Human nature." He grinned, relaxed now. "I liked to think I could manage it by myself."

"Ed, if you hadn't known another ceremonial magician, what could you have done?"

"I could have pulled out of my tailspin by finding a good psychiatrist."

That led us right into a discussion of Charles and his opinions—and his experiences. Ed concurred with everything Charles had told me.

"A lot of magic is in the subconscious. How much? No one knows. But a psychiatrist knows a lot about the subconscious. He could have thrown a wet blanket over what I had done and smothered those embers I couldn't put out. But, by the same token, he could have blocked me psychically from future magical work by applying the techniques of psychoanalysis."

Ed said that he wanted to avoid that at all costs.

"Psychiatrists can help, sure. But it would be like having a psychic lobotomy."

Harold had always told me that the great majority of dabblers in ceremonial magic are protected by their own ineptitude. They fail to get results and consequently come to no harm.

"But if they should succeed, they would find they have their hands full," he warned.

I have already said that I met one authentic witch, Robert, from my early ad in *The Village Voice*. He told me that he knew of a New York attorney—a friend of a friend—who had dabbled in magic, with very unfortunate results. Robert gave me the man's name and address and suggested I get in touch with him directly. Robert said he couldn't act as a go-between because the man wanted nothing whatsoever to do with witches. It was his feeling, however, that this attorney might be willing to talk to me about his experience with magic.

I followed through on Robert's suggestion, and somewhat

to my surprise the attorney was agreeable. I am calling him Louis.

Louis had just been released from a state mental institution when we met. He told me that he was more than willing to talk about his experience if it would serve to help others avoid the trap which snapped on him. Louis had just joined a new law firm on Wall Street, he said, adding that they knew he had been hospitalized for three months for a "nervous breakdown." He feels this is a handicap difficult enough to overcome.

"But if," he said, "I admitted freely what I know to be true, that I was literally 'possessed by a demon,' then, I suppose, I'd get locked up again."

Except to say that he is in his late twenties, further identification is pointless and might prove harmful to his future career.

Louis told me that he had belonged to a very small group of curious men and women who decided it would be fun to study magic and that they had, as an experiment, tried out several rituals which, he now realizes, were far beyond their capacities. The others remained relatively unscathed. He was not so fortunate.

"Perhaps I am predisposed to attracting evil forces," he said philosophically. "It was a gradual thing. First, I began sleeping badly. My dreams were getting worse all the time. After about two months of that, I had reached the point where, even during the daytime, I would suddenly go into periods of withdrawal. They would last anywhere from a few minutes at first up to an hour or so as these periods progressed.

"The only way I can describe the sensation is to say that it was as if my astral body was quite detached, floating around, while observing my own physical body doing and saying quite irrational things. At the very beginning, it was a unique and—yes, to be honest—even pleasant experience. It was one helluva high. I was foolish enough to think I could continue to be objective. I always felt certain I could stop the experience at any time. But when it persisted, and such periods of detachment grew longer, I became alarmed and began to fight back. That struggle in itself was very weakening. I was never in a blackout.

I was always only too aware of what was going on. And then, one day, I couldn't get back. It was as if I, myself, were standing aside while I coolly watched a complete stranger wearing my face and clothes and using my hands to deliberately and systematically tear my office apart.

"The place was a complete shambles by the time my boss realized what was going on, had called the doctor, and they carried that body away in an ambulance."

During his three months in the hospital, he was heavily tranquilized. He had several psychiatric interviews but said that he volunteered no information about his experiments with magic or expressed his belief that he had been possessed by a demon he had inadvertently attracted.

His immediate family has quite accepted the medical explanation that he cracked up temporarily due to tension and overwork. He quit the job he held previously, stopped seeing his former friends and is now hopeful that he has, by completely changing his environment, also broken the demonological hold.

I was curious to know if there was a connection between the story Louis told me and an item which appeared in Earl Wilson's column in the *New York Post* in the spring of 1968.

"Would you believe there's a coven of witches in Wall Street who have used their alleged 'powers' to prevent some conglomerate acquisitions, and also influenced proxy fights?" columnist Wilson asked.

Louis declined to answer. "No comment" was as much as he would say.

He offered another "no comment" when I attempted to find out what kind of ritual he used and where he found it. It was his view that he would be responsible if someone else imitated his experiment and fell into a psychic pit. His attitude points up another problem.

One of the greatest difficulties a would-be magician faces is the fact that there is no "beginners" manual. Witches believe that those who try out magic often attempt too much too fast. They insist that the art of magic can only be safely taught on a face-to-face basis until a level of competence is reached. Books such as Lévi's *History of Magic*, Waite's *Ceremonial Magic*, Israel Regardie's *The Tree of Life*

and Franz Bardon's *Initiation into Hermetics* are all in print. Anyone can buy copies. The trouble is, they are considered far too advanced for the neophyte.

Aside from the possibility of magical mishaps, mainline witches often express deep concern for teen-agers who plunge into witchcraft with no supervision and no realization of their own underlying motives.

"Sometimes it is a lack of self-esteem," Harold Thomas commented to me when we were talking about this. "I've seen girls who seem to say to themselves, 'I'm rotten. Therefore I am going to be a witch and help everyone out.' Maybe witchcraft *can* give them a sense of values once they develop a healthy mental attitude. Witchcraft may even become important to them. Maybe not. In any event, sometimes they do gain in self-knowledge."

Jane joined in. "One of the earliest lessons an aspiring witch must learn is self-respect," she said. "Harold and I believe the Christian concept of 'Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself' is all right in principle. It's just backward.

"How," she asked, "can you extend love to another when you don't love yourself?"

Harold picked up the conversation. "It's not unusual to see young girls—and boys—jumping into witchcraft for another reason. Just to torment their parents. Then their basic motive is manipulative. And that's no good either."

"The Bills" agree.

I showed them the October 1968 issue of *New York Scenes,* a small slick magazine, since expired, which called itself "A New York Kind of Survival Kit."

In that issue, reporter Mary Bringle wrote an article called "The Ordinary, Everyday New York Witch." All the so-called witches who were quoted in the story were identified only by a first name. Some of the magic which they professed to perform, both Bills promptly classified as the "kick" approach.

One girl, for instance, said that she had the ability to make impotent any man who crossed her. Bill Janney, highly amused, pointed out that such an ability does not necessarily require the art of witchcraft.

Joe Lukach had been equally amused by the reported talents of a young witch called Linda that were mentioned in

the same article. Linda was quoted as saying that if she, for example, wished to make a book come winging out of a shelf and land on the head of anyone sitting in the room, she must also be prepared to let that book land on her own head.

"That's just a dumb, show-off stunt," Joe commented. "Like 'Look, Ma, no hands.' Linda is obviously some kind of young dabbler. My advice to her is to watch out. Some day she may find that the 'book of life' has clobbered her silly."

Another exposure to the teen-age preoccupation with witchcraft came in June 1969 when a segment of the NBC *First Tuesday* documentary offered a view of high-school kids at occult play.

Commented critic Harriet Van Horne: "That spooks and spells are a current fad in America's high schools shouldn't come as a surprise. It was the frenzied fantasies of teen-age girls that set off the witchcraft trials in old Salem. Watching these youngsters hold seances ('We are going to bring back Madame Curie,' proclaimed one teen-age medium), put a hex on indifferent swains and boil up lizards and other oddities in a witches' brew suggested that parents and teachers are failing in teaching these children to cope with the stresses of their environment. (Madame Curie, by the way, couldn't make it to the seance.)"

I watched this show with Joe Lukach and several other members of his coven. As soon as that particular part of the program was over, Joe turned off the television set. For a moment, no one spoke. Then Joe cleared his throat, lit a cigarette and broke the silence.

"Embarrassing, isn't it?" he remarked quietly to no one in particular. Then he turned to me. "And that, Susan, is a perfect example of a bunch of puberty-struck girls in action." Joe still spoke quietly, but the anger in his tone was unmistakable. "They should get a clout on their behinds from their parents before they get smashed in some psychic disaster," he said, ending his comments on the affair.

Some youngsters, however, are deeply and sincerely involved in the Old Religion. Ed Fitch tells me of such a group in Chicago. He has visited with them and has been

quite impressed. He says that they are high-school students, their ages ranging from fifteen to eighteen, that they have authentic rituals and that they take their work very seriously. He says he is certain they are going to continue to progress in the Craft. They won't be, he assured me, on television.

Certainly they are the youngest authentic group I have either known or heard of.

And the oldest?

Mack told me of at least a half-dozen covens in California that keep very much to themselves and would go into a state of shock at the very idea of mentioning the Craft publicly. He said most of the members are in their sixties, have lived secretly for many years and have no intention of changing their way.

But they are not the oldest.

For months, I have corresponded with witch Leslie Qualls of Boston. And she says she is 113!

Young or old, all witches are also involved with those six other astral planes, not only the lower first.

What are they?

Joe explained that they spiral upward toward divinity. The second, third and fourth are, in many respects, quite similar to our physical plane, except that the souls who inhabit them become less and less emersed in the passions, desires and needs that engross physical man. By the time the fourth plane is reached, the demands of our physical nature are exhausted.

"The three highest divisions are so far removed from the material world that they are difficult for us to imagine," he said.

"The fifth division is said to be a spiritual summerland whose inhabitants live in a world created entirely by their own thoughts. The sixth division is a state of bliss. It is on this plane that Christians, Mohammedans, Hindus, Jews—all faiths—finally reach their common spiritual goals together. The seventh one is vastly higher—the complete mental plane.

"Some," Joe said, "call it the Godhead."

To most of us, that top plane is summed up by a familiar phrase we use to express ecstasy, "seventh heaven."

To a Satanist, all these witch beliefs are only targets for gleeful derision. Witches, for their part, sometimes speak rather formally of Satanists as "followers of the left-hand path."

As for Satanists, they call witches who practice white magic by many names. "Neo-pagan" and "pseudo-Christian" are two of their pets.

13. Tuesday in Toledo

"God is Evil. This Creator God—we call him the Demiurge—you Christians and Jews worship is *very, very* evil. Now, Eve and Adam and then Cain, in that order, were the first of us Satanists because they turned away from their Creator."

I interrupted him right there.

"Herb, I'm not a Biblical scholar, but aren't you going back to the Bible and the Garden of Eden? You say you are a witch. Yet, all the other witches I know say they are pagans."

"I'm not a Biblical scholar myself, so there you and me tread on common ground," he responded promptly. "We don't know when or where the Garden of Eden was. Biblical? Nonsense. Nothing but folklore until it got wrote up."

Dr. Herbert Sloane, Covenator of Our Lady of Endor Coven, the Ophite Cultus Sathanas (he is also known as Kala), and I were sitting in his headquarters in Toledo, Ohio. I was there at his invitation to a meeting of his coven that night at nine.

The witches I know spit and sputter whenever witchcraft and Satanism are mentioned in the same breath. Yet, some months before, in response to a written request from me, Dr. Sloane had sent me his manifesto, a three-page single-spaced mimeographed document written in question-and-answer form. One question he posed:

"Are witches and Satanists one and the same people?" His answer to his question:

"The words *wicca* and *Gnosis* are oft confusing and separated: the former meaning WISDOM and the latter

KNOWLEDGE, of course in both cases in the purely religious sense rather than the material. It is the position of the true SATANIST to oft suppose that many witches have fallen into error by worshiping a Fertility God, and hence a devotion to and a reverence of matter."

I wanted him to elaborate personally on that point.

"Are you suggesting that witchcraft and Satanism are one and the same—that somewhere back in antiquity there was a schism, so to speak?" I asked.

"Now let's speculate on that one for a while," Herb answered.

He slouched in his straight-back chair, crossed his legs and fit a Player cigarette into a black holder. Herb is about six feet tall and lean, except for a healthy paunch that makes his legs seem longer and skinnier. He has a tendency to slump. He had taken off his suit jacket. Black suspenders pulled his black trousers well up and over his middle bulge, making his legs seem longer still.

His snow-white hair is thinning now. He's sixty-three. As he took a drag on his cigarette, he pulled at his billy-goat whiskers, which begin where his chin ends. The goatee, too, according to earlier pictures, has thinned with the years.

His eyes are deep-set, large and heavily lidded. They are a pale piercing blue and he meets your look directly. At one point during his varied career as a barber, cardiologist (card reader) and tasseographist (tea reader), he studied hypnotism.

His manifesto had already made it clear that he believes Satanism is rooted in the Gnostic doctrine. He is a dedicated student of the book *Gnostic Religion,* by Hans Jonas, and freely recommends it as required reading for everyone. His own personal copy is well worn and many passages are heavily underscored.

What is Gnosticism?

Historically speaking, there is disagreement about how and when Gnosticism evolved. It was one of the many "mystery" religions to emerge when Christians came out of the catacombs. Since its members were sworn to secrecy and the movement did not survive, little is known of Gnosticism.

Henry Angar Kelly, in his book *The Devil, Demonology and Witchcraft*, published in 1968, has put it this way:

"Some believe it to be essentially Jewish, while others claim a Christian basis and still others find its origin in pagan thought, either Hellenistic or Oriental. What is certain is that it freely made use of many elements, Jewish, Christian and pagan, religious and philosophical."

While Herbert Sloane is basically a mild-mannered man, he is also verbose, and when he was ready to expound on his own theory, he plunged right in.

"*No* theological speculation is *fact*," he emphasized at once. "It's all belief. No empirical data supports *any* religion. It's all 'once upon a time.' Now, *Gnosis* comes from a Greek word meaning 'knowledge.' I take it to mean knowledge of a God above and beyond the Demiurge. *Wicca* simply means 'wise.' And *pagan* comes from a Latin word meaning 'rural.' "

Taken one at a time, his statements sounded reasonable. Put them together?

"But how does all that add up to you?" I asked.

"My speculation," he said at once. "I figure that witchcraft stands to Satanism just like the Greek Orthodox Church stands to the Roman Catholic. A long time ago, they was the same. Somewhere along the way, they split.

"Now, we all know," he continued, warming to his subject, "pagans—that means rural folks—became wise in the ways of nature and herbs. Somewhere, around the second century, when orthodox Christianity took over, the real meaning of *knowledge* was lost to witches and their *wisdom* turned to herbalism and magic. They forgot the knowledge. There is a God *beyond* the Creator God. A Being. A Spirit Being commonly known as Satan in English and *Sathanas* in Latin."

"Were you ever a Christian, Herb?" I interrupted again, curious now about his early personal-life exposure to religion.

"Never!" he said emphatically. "I've never gone to church as a communicant. Never been baptised or circumcised. I was spiritually protected against them both. Now, as an observer, I've been to all churches. And, I

figure early—choose between God and the Devil, Devil's better every time. Like choosing between Democratic or Republican."

His comparison struck me as being odd and I laughed.

"One political party is good—the other evil?" I asked.

"No difference between good and evil," he corrected at once.

"Why?"

"All the same. The whole Cosmos is under the Demiurge. We can't live in this misconstructed world the Creator God made without causing suffering. Neither you nor me or a kangaroo in Australia."

"It is my understanding that members of the Craft generally lean toward the concept of two forces—although they must, ultimately, become one," I pointed out.

"Nonsense." Herb was impatient to proceed.

"That's where the split came when they lost their *knowledge*. There are no two forces—only one, like electricity. I can use electricity to cook dinner, or to electrocute someone. Depends entirely on my motive and intent. Neither constructive nor destructive—only as it's directed to be."

This view of magic is generally in line with what witches had told me: Summed up, there is only one form of magic. The intent of the operator determines the form—good or bad, black or white.

Back to the same old puzzle. Here Herbert Sloane, a professed Satanist, a Devil worshiper, was trying to tell me that *intent* was the clue. Since he insisted that God was evil, would it then not follow that all God's works were evil? He had indicated that also. So, could I assume he would deliberately practice what other witches call black magic fully convinced that he was doing the right thing?

These are some of the questions which ran through my mind while I looked at him carefully. He was sitting there, serenely smoking his cigarette, careful to flick the ashes before they dropped to the floor, the very picture of a benign elderly gentleman.

When he broke the silence to offer to make a pot of coffee, I was pleased at the interruption. I needed a

breather—a chance to look around and assess my surroundings, hoping for additional clues before we got any deeper into the subject.

I was not afraid of him. I was not even particularly apprehensive about his powers, no matter how Satanic they might turn out to be. In the first place, although I had endured one highly unpleasant experience my witch friends had assured me was a psychic attack, that occurred during the early morning hours when I was half asleep and vulnerable to my own imagination, if nothing else. But this was broad daylight.

Nevertheless, when Herb did get up to go into the back of the building to brew the coffee, I fingered the four-thousand-year-old Egyptian scarab ring that belonged to Joe, which he had given me to wear for the trip.

"This is for your special protection," he had said when he slipped it on my finger. He also assured me that he would be at his own altar in New York at the precise time that the Toledo coven was slated to meet. Joseph Wilson, in Topeka, when he learned that I had accepted the Satanic invitation, had also called to say that his coven would be meeting that night at the same time. They fully intended to throw up a screen of protection around me in the event any of the forces of Lucifer would be unleashed.

As soon as Herb left, I got up to walk around for my first real look at his quarters. My initial impression had been one of utter confusion. We were in a long, narrow "shot-gun" first-floor store-front arrangement. Sometimes this type of structure is known as a "railroad flat." The front room—the one we were in—had originally been set up as a tonsorial parlor. That antiquated phrase popped immediately to mind. It perfectly suited the shop's equipment. Two barber chairs were piled high with cardboard cartons and their contents—whatever they were—concealed by cotton throws of some sort, possibly old bedspreads. Two large, circular mirrors hung on the wall behind the chairs, over identical shampoo sinks. One mirror was flecked with artificial snowflakes—the other was yellowed and crazed.

Glossy nine-by-twelve prints were thumbtacked over the rest of the wall on that side of the room. The paint on

the walls, once a pallid, institutional green, now was graying and peeling in spots. I walked over for a closer look at the pictures. All were of exotic dancers, affectionately and personally autographed with such names as "Baby Lulu Wilnot, the Pocket Pinup," "Kitty Land," "Martini Martin," "April March," "Electrique—the High Voltage Girl."

Herb came back while I was in the midst of this survey and proudly pointed out "Baby Thelma."

"She weighs in at 685 pounds and is known to show biz as a nonworking act. She doesn't do anything. She just sits." He flourished a card he said he had been carrying since 1963, which names him an honorary member in the Exotique Dancers League of America, an organization founded in New York in 1955, I learned. He then pointed out a picture I had overlooked, a supper-club type of shot. Men, women—and a doll. The celebration? The doll's birthday. Why a party for a doll?

"She is the mascot for the coven," Herb explained proudly. "Her name is April Belle Llodgar. That's rag doll—spelled backwards."

"That's interesting," I answered, at a loss for a more pertinent response.

Herb then offered a tour of the rest of the apartment. "April is in the bedroom," he added. "I want you to meet her."

As we walked toward the rear of the shop, he told me that the bedroom was also used for coven meetings.

"I call it the Dragon's Den. Artist friend of mine decorated it up some for me."

When Herb flung open the door that separated the shop from bedroom, I was not quite prepared for the rosy—not red—painted flames that shot up from the floor and licked toward the dirty white ceiling. Black smoke at the tops of the flames wreathed into leering black Devil faces. The head of this double bed paralleled the door, the side of it forming an aisle halfway down the room. The bed was covered with a plain white tufted spread.

Blown-up photographs were pinned to the far wall over the side of the bed. One, a full front view of a nude woman, completely overpowered its flaming background.

Obesity flattened her features. Long black hair dripped in strings over her shoulders. Her breasts rolled down her front like two huge blobs of blubber.

She also (I later learned she was a departed member of the coven) possessed a crop of pubic hair so luxurious it could easily have been plaited.

The rest of the wall was taken over by shadow boxes of assorted sizes, hanging crooked, holding a seemingly endless collection of black cats, goblins, dancing red devils, pitchforks, halloween novelties. . . . In the very center of the wall was a framed portrait of Lucifer himself, the crimson of his face clashing violently with the rosy-red flames that surrounded him.

An about-face brought me almost directly nose-to-nose with more flames and a photograph of the High Priest of Our Lady of Endor Coven. Suitable to the rest of the decor, Herb had posed for the picture clad only in the horns clapped to his head. Whether out of modesty or whether out of symbolic intent—I will never know—Herb held a hearth broom which almost covered his private parts. Modesty, however, did not prevent him from pinning a red ribbon embossed with gold letters spelling "witch" onto the simple black frame.

April Belle, a red-headed rag doll about twenty-four inches tall, was sitting at the far end of the room in a child's straight-backed chair. Herb suggested we walk over so he could formally introduce us. I suggested we go back to get the coffee since there was still a lot of territory to be covered. On that note, we left the Dragon's Den.

By the time we were settled in the shop again, I had decided I would wait until after the coven meeting to talk more about his views of black magic versus white. Instead, I asked him why he was a Satanist at all. He was eager to explain.

"I come by it by osmosis, I guess," he began. "Satanism is a called religion and I was called when I was three years old."

At that time, he was the only child at home and was living with his parents on a farm in Canada, he told me.

"One day, I was playing in the woods out back. Mind you now, I didn't even know what religion meant. Suddenly, ten foot away, on an upturned tree stump, a figure transfigurated."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked.

"Changed features. The tree stump did. I can remember it if I never remember another thing. Bright, sunny day. Feeling I belonged right there. A feeling deeper than love or friendship."

"You knew that at three years old?"

"No. Not in them words. But it was somewhat like a child lost in a supermarket and suddenly looks up to find its mother. Anyway, there was a black Being sitting there, looking at me."

"How did it look?"

"I can even show you," he said. With that he went over to a glass-fronted bookcase and brought back *The God of the Witches* by Margaret Murray, an English anthropologist who died in 1963.

"Got hold of this book about ten years ago," he explained. "On the dust jacket, here was the figure I seen that day when I was a little boy."

The figure itself, the one he identifies as Sathanas, is described in the text of the book as follows:

"The earliest known representation of a deity is in the Caverne des Trois Frères in Ariège and dates to the late Paleolithic period. The figure is that of a man clothed in the skin of a stag and wearing on his head the antlers of a stag. The hide of the animal covers the whole of the man's body, the hands and feet are drawn as though seen through a transparent material, thus conveying to the spectator the information that the figure is a disguised human being. The face is bearded, the eyes large and round, but there is some doubt whether the artist intended to represent the man-animal with a mask or with the face uncovered."

Herb then told me that the Lord Sathanas appeared to him the second time when he was twenty-five years old and living in Zanesville, Ohio, and that the experience triggered his "book studies."

"I tottered off to the library and began to read and it hasn't ended yet," he said.

He added that he had been told by a psychic that the same vision would appear for the third time before he passed over and that since he expected to leave his corporate body on October 13, 1988, such an event might not take place before many moons.

On the material level, Herb Sloane has spent all his adult life in the Midwest, mostly in Ohio and Indiana, with occasional short stays in Canada. He finished high school when he was seventeen and then, as he says, "Since I didn't know what I wanted, thought I'd learn blacksmithing. Half learned to shoe a horse."

By the time he was twenty-one, he decided he wanted to be a barber and went to the Moler Barber College in Cleveland.

"Meanwhile, I got a chance to go to Villa Nova Interstate University, which is also in Cleveland. I speak of its name as being a state of mind, not of geography," he added.

By the time he was twenty-seven, he became a cardologist, thanks to the Villa Nova training, and adopted the name of Kala while he followed this calling. During his late twenties he became interested in show business and took a course in hypnosis. He said that he always liked to go to carnival and medicine shows, and one summer during that time joined the F. E. Gooding Carnival in Mansfield, Ohio, and traveled all summer with them as a card reader.

He also has a framed certificate on his walls from the Haleys Psychic Self Improvement Institute of Chicago, made out to him for his proficiency in cardopractic and tasseography. He acquired the title "Doctor" along with it.

He told me that he bought the barbershop he now occupies about eleven years ago. Today, he is in semiretirement and plies that trade by appointment only. The glass store front still has the gold-leaf block letters rimmed in black which spell "BARBER" across the center of the pane. The window shades are kept drawn. Inside the shop, hand-lettered signs, scattered at random, advertise "Bewitched Haircuts" and "Shear Magic" trims.

He also gives card readings at $2.50 a session. A space opposite the seldom-used barber chairs had been cleared away for this purpose. The top of an antique mahogany

table is covered with oilcloth of a red and black patchwork design. The table holds two ceramic ashtrays. One is a statue of the King of Clubs, the other the Queen of Hearts. The base of the trays can hold only one cigarette stub. There are also a small brass bowl, a pottery camel, a cigarette lighter shaped like Aladdin's Lamp, a wooden box with carved initials spelling "Cards," a small black cat head holding sticks of incense, a black and red glass cat, a line of tea boxes covered with paper dragons and a small black teapot shaped like a cat. Miniature playing cards are pasted on the wall by the side of the desk, along with a row of dunce caps decorated with card symbols.

I asked Herb to clear a space and read for me, but he said it was too late, since the Maid of the Coven was scheduled to come by early to drive us to a cafeteria for dinner. He suggested that I wash up before she arrived and told me that the rest-room facilities were in the basement. He opened the door that led downstairs and switched on the light. I started down.

At the bottom of the stairs a cardboard cutout of an enormous pumpkin glowed orange. Across its forehead was another of Herb's hand-lettered signs. This one read "Goblin Approved Privvy [sic]." And, below its grinning mouth hung another sign with an arrow pointing the way. This one announced, "Just a few hoofbeats to your right."

Inside the privy another notice was taped to the walls over the toilet paper. "Sorceressers! [sic!] Peeing Here Will Put the Seat Back Up! By Order of the Pee Wee Privvy Orderly."

As I left, my eye caught the sign on a closed door to the right of the toilet. This one announced, "The Catacombs of Haunts and Horrors! Mortals Enter at Own Risk!"

I headed right back up the stairs and, within moments, the Maid of the Coven arrived and we left for dinner. When we returned, I again asked for a card reading. Herb demurred, saying there was just enough time left to prepare for the meeting of the coven.

With that, he disappeared and I set about organizing the notes I had taken during the afternoon and outlined some questions I still wanted to ask. The Maid of the Coven busied herself setting up for the refreshments which

were to be served at the end of the meeting. It was immediately apparent that we were to have pots of tea and fortune cookies.

Maid of the Coven? What does that title mean? Nothing official in the hierarchy of this particular group insofar as I could note. She seemed to be there to serve as hostess, not to participate in the rituals. Although we had shared dinner, I never learned her real name and only know for certain that, by day, she is a nurse. She was a sturdy Ingrid Bergman type, this night dressed as if she were prepared for tea at Buckingham Palace. Basic black with a five-strand rope of pearls—long ash-blond hair pristinely wrapped around her head in coronet braids.

Herb returned almost immediately and headed for the undecorated mirror behind the first barber chair. He had fetched his plastic horns.

When he had them securely in place and donned his black knee-length satin cape, he was ready for his role as High Priest. He turned down the lights in the room so no one from the outside would be attracted to any unusual activity. It was quarter to nine. We sat in silence, waiting for the members to arrive.

His regular coven itself is relatively small, consisting of half a dozen members. Several guests were expected, however, since he sometimes allows others to attend certain selected meetings. This was one of them.

As the moments dragged, Herb grew visibly nervous. The Maid of the Coven brought him a pill and a glass of water. I asked what kind of pill. He'd told me earlier of a 1964 heart attack. Now he merely said this one was a prescription for nerves. More than once he muttered to himself, "We must begin promptly at nine."

I got up to check the clock that hung on the wall in the space where the girlie prints ended. Another hand-lettered sign over it read, "BLACK CAT TIME." The clock underneath was black plastic and was, indeed, shaped like a cat. Head and body were stationary. Its ping-pong eyeballs, centered with chunks of red glass, were surrounded by rhinestones. They clicked from side to side in rhythm with the ticking of the clock. The body of the cat was the clock. Its numerals were also outlined in rhinestones. A

long black tail—more rhinestones—served as the pendulum to the clock and it swung to the rhythm of the ticking of the clock and the clicking of the eyes. It was seven minutes to nine, black cat time.

At six minutes to nine, there was a discreet tapping from the front. Herb walked quietly over to ease open the door. Although members and guests were arriving from a variety of places, one as far away as Dayton, it seemed that everyone piled in, if not at once, then certainly within a very few minutes of each other. The greetings at the door were hasty and the introductions that followed, haphazard. I was inadvertently introduced by Herb as Susan Richards. We filed at once into the bedroom Herb had converted into a meeting room and sat down in straight-backed chairs lined up against the wall. The altar was a typewriter table, covered with a black cloth. The door to the barbershop was shut. The lights dimmed. We sat there, staring at the crimson-faced Lucifer, a black candle burning in a brass holder, the blown-up nude photograph of the dear departed member and the black-caped, horned priest. April Belle Llodgar sat in her chair, which had been placed on the bed, silently surveying us all.

On the altar was a round can. Once upon a time, it probably contained coffee. Now it was painted shocking pink. Little red devil faces were pasted around it at random. As soon as we settled, Herb reached into the can and drew forth a tin clapper. This novelty has no proper name. They are usually given out on New Year's Eve for noisemakers. He shook it smartly several times. The meeting of the Ophite Cultus Sathanas was called to order.

Services began with an invocation. Herb turned his back and, arms upraised, directly addressed the portrait of Lucifer. I could only catch the phrase, "Satan be with us. Let us pray." I fingered the scarab. And stared at the naked woman.

Within seconds, he turned again to face his odd flock and began to recite his creed. We made no responses. He faltered a time or two. Either he had not committed it to memory or the light was too dim for him to read it easily. He had furnished me with a copy earlier in the afternoon. This is the way it goes:

"I believe in an Infinite Intelligence incomprehensible to all finite beings. I believe in SATHANAS as my savior by virtue of the Ophitic Gnosis booned by Him to Our Blessed Mother Eve in the Garden of Eden. I believe in Eve as Our Mundane Mother. The Blessed Succubus Lilith as Our Spiritual Mother. I believe in Asmondeus and all the Powers and Principalities of the Celestial Realms of Sathanas. I believe in the communion of the succubus and the incubus. I believe in the Gnosis of the Ophitic Cultus Sathanas, in Goety and in the final release of the soul of all faithful witches from the powers of the disdained Demiurge until a life everlasting in Orcus. All this through the Power and the Goodness, the Guidance and the Wisdom of Our Lord Sathanas . . . world without end. Mena. Mena. Mena. Mena."

Mena? Earlier I had asked what it meant.

"Amen spelled backwards," he had explained.

"No, it isn't," I said somewhat testily.

"Well, maybe not exactly. But it sounds better," he insisted.

Mena it was.

With that, he was ready for the "first reading," the next order of his litany. He chose to read the following verses from Deuteronomy:

"When thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire or that useth divination or an observor of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord: and because of these abominations the Lord thy God doth drive them out before thee."

I was beyond surprise at anything he might spring after that Bible passage. I could only continue to stare at him through the pink haze that filled the room, idly thinking that he looked like Pa Kettle playing Aleister Crowley.

It seemed to me he could have used a couple of extra "mena, mena's" at the end of the passage, but no, he moved right ahead into coven "Announcements." For one fleeting

moment I wondered if we were to have the posting of the banns and other items of interest usually included at this point in the Catholic Mass, but no such thing, of course. Instead he now introduced us formally. I was still Susan Richards—a name I have never used with him or anyone else.

He then went on to explain to those of us who were novices at a Satanic mass that communion was to follow and outlined what we were to expect. With that, he turned his back again, and after a few mumbled incantations toward Satan, picked up a chalice from the nearest shadow box on the wall. With his left hand, he picked up a long black rod with a red blob on the end. In the uncertain light, it was impossible to make out the symbol. He had told us that he would pass the chalice, which contained apple juice (a symbol of Eve), to each member, counterclockwise, and as he approached, each of us would stand instead of kneel as we sipped from the cup.

With that, the passing of the communion cup began. As each person stood up to accept the sip of apple juice, he passed the black wand over their head and blessed them in the name of Satan.

I was tag-end of the group. When he paused in front of me, I remained seated, fully prepared to raise a little hell of my own if necessary. There was a long hesitation while I ignored the chalice. Then he moved slowly on, back to his altar.

The sermon that customarily would have followed was skipped that night, since he planned to spend most of the time ordinarily allotted to his rituals to the social hour instead. The benediction, in the name of Satan, followed, and then we all moved into the shop part of the building for tea, fortune cookies and conversation.

I had a plane to catch back to New York in two hours. Time was running out for me and for that I was very grateful. Stupefied by the silly little ceremony I had just witnessed, I stood apart from the group as long as I could without attracting notice and tried to collect my wits.

I knew that budding witches are taught from the beginning of their training not to curse the name by which another soul calls God. They believe we all worship the same

force, although we use different names and different symbols.

Well, one question was answered to my satisfaction. By that criterion, these Satanists also invented *chutzpah* about the same time they decided to call themselves witches.

Witches—in fact, all magicians, black or white—believe completely in the power of ritual. All their ceremonial instruments are magnetized to draw psychic power, no matter how they plan to use it. But an old coffee can plastered with cheap decals? A tin clapper designed for use as a noisemaker? This is a bell? Summoning the faithful to worship Sathanas? Forget the rest of the props, that was enough for me.

Suddenly, as if a plug had been pulled, what little energy remained with me after a long, exhausting and confusing day drained away.

I felt sorry for Sathanas.

Before getting ready to leave, I managed a few words with Thom Frushour, a Toledo artist during the winter and an Indiana nudist by summer. He is a dedicated member of the Satanic cult and a member of the Church of Satan. So is Dr. Sloane. Thom strongly urged that I send away to the Church for further information and get hold of their rituals. Our conversation was interrupted by a young girl, about sixteen, who told me she had come to the meeting because she was doing an article on witchcraft for her high school paper and wanted me to recommend books for her to read on the subject. She didn't feel she had learned much so far.

Another guest, a stage magician, came up to say "Hello" and he said he wasn't a member of the group but that he came to meetings when he wasn't on the road, since he found them amusing. As he left, I crossed the room and cornered Herb. He had promised to give me his views on marriage. I had written to him before specifically to ask him to explain them. His written remarks on the subject that are included in his mimeographed manifesto are somewhat unique, to say the least. In that document, he states:

"Satanists can marry under any number of arrangements:

for so many moons, until cancellation is the objective of one or both, until death parts them, or for this mundane plane and planes to come. Satanist marriages are different, too, in that the Satanist may marry a spirit being, some other species of animal life, or even a tree or plant."

"What about that?" I asked him now.

His answer rolled right back at me.

"We think of marriage as the uniting of two kindred spirits and hold the theological position that elements of light or spirit are trapped in all matter, and it is this element we unite in marriage. This is not like granting a license for two beings to sleep together as does the church and state. Since Satanists can*not* possibly be moral or immoral by creator worship standards, I think the word amoral could best be applied."

I was scribbling madly.

"To you?" I asked.

"Certainly to me."

"Have you ever been married? Legally, that is?"

"Yes, twice. First in 1928. Second in 1954. No offspring. Legally at liberty since 1957."

Time was going fast now. I wasn't sure how I would get out to the airport.

"Thom says you don't practice ritualistic magic. Is that true?"

"Well, now, magic is just a name given to the science of causing events to occur in conformity with will. It's a mind science. All churches have ceremonies. All have magicians. Same thing when witches practice magic. May be more ceremony. I believe magic works twenty percent of the time. Eighty percent is fate. No, I do not practice magic in the accepted way. I just say prayers."

And now time was really short. The guest who had driven in from Dayton offered to drop me off at the airport and I accepted the lift. My Tuesday in Toledo was done.

Shortly afterward, I received a letter from Herb regarding his marriages.

"In the way I (but not the State) understand things," he wrote, "in the spring of 1942 on the night of April 30, which is Lilithmass to witches of my sect, I and Dorothea Rowe of Castleton-on-Hudson, New York, U.S.A., did

MARRY EACH OTHER for this world and worlds to come. We were together only in the spirit at our marriage. Physically, I was in the Gilbert Islands of the Pacific, and she in Texas."

Herb had told me that he had served a brief hitch in the Pacific during World War II as a barber. The wedding obviously took place during that time.

"It must be understood," he added, that witches of our sect can marry until death do us part OR for this expression of life and for expressions of life yet to come. This is found outside our cult too in the Church of the Latter Day Saints, commonly called the Mormon Church."

Before I had a chance to write back and ask what happened to *this* marriage, I received another note from him.

"I omitted saying what became of Dorothea Rowe, my this and other world's wife. She was killed in an automobile accident in Texas on 17 June 1942, just some six weeks following our marriage in Sathanas's name. Oh yes, I've heard from her since she went to join the faithful departed and Our Lord Sathanas."

He did not explain how he had heard. I did not ask.

A month later I received another letter from him, bringing me up to date with his personal relationship with his Lord Sathanas.

"You'll want to know this," he began. "I told you that HE was to appear to me yet a third time during the course of this incarnation. Well, he did just that during the course of a materialization seance attended by seventeen people at a Toledo Spiritualist Church on Easter Sunday. However, he identified himself in such a way that only I recognized him for who HE really was.

"His message to me was that the mission HE wanted me to perform in Toledo was completed. My impressions had been that such was the case following your visit and the work in HIS name that we undertook."

14. Satanism for Sixteen Dollars

Anyone can join the Church of Satan—for a price. No personal interview necessary.

Anton Szandor LaVey, High Priest and Exarch of Hell, as he signs himself, advertises his Satanic wares openly and freely. For instance, the *San Francisco Express Times*, an underground newspaper, carries such notices as "Witches Workshop with Anton LaVey. 9 P.M. $2.50," and "Workshop for witches-to-be" with the name and address. He also writes a regular feature for the *National Insider* called "Letter from the Devil."

I took the advice of Thom Frushour of Toledo and posted a card from New York to the San Francisco Satanic headquarters. In return, I received a mimeographed letter which began:

"Information concerning the Church of Satan is now available on a *limited* basis to sincerely interested individuals."

The next paragraph assured me that they were not a proselytizing religion and that membership was offered only to qualified persons. The letter then asked for a donation of three dollars—meant, they said, to discourage the idly curious.

I filled out the coupon at the bottom of this form letter and shot it off with three one-dollar bills by return mail.

About two weeks later, a plain nine-by-twelve manila envelope arrived.

The monograph I had been promised in return for the three dollars was mimeographed on daffodil paper and bound into a plain black folder. When I flicked open the folder, a white insert sheet fell out. This was a "Question-

naire for Membership in the Church of Satan."

It asked for name, address, telephone, sex, marital status, date of birth (with the notation "to the Satanist one's own birthday is the most important holiday of the year"), height, weight, color eyes, color hair (they wanted a photo as well), name and birthdate of spouse if married, names of children, past religious beliefs, nationality background, educational background, occupation, other talents or abilities, hobbies or interests, any other personal comments one cared to add, personal reasons for interest in Satanism and how the applicant heard about the Church.

The bottom line read: ENCLOSED IS $20.00 FOR REGISTRATION AND LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP PLUS $—— ADDITIONAL DONATION FOR CHURCH EXPENSES. For some reason, the twenty-dollar figure had been crossed out and thirteen dollars inked in over it. There was then a space provided for signature plus additional space allotted for the signature of a parent or guardian if under eighteen years of age.

I typed up the answers and lied about everything except my sex, name and address and went out to buy a money order for thirteen dollars and an airmail stamp.

My reasons for lying? The oldest in the world. There may *not* be anything to magic—black or white—but why take the chance? Besides, and even more importantly, I wanted to see if anyone would bother to check out what amounted to a blind inquiry.

I had heard all about psychometry from witches and knew how carefully and laboriously they screen all applicants by every occult method they can muster. I could do nothing about whatever "vibrations" were in my response. But I ignored the request for a picture. As for the date of birth I used, it indicates no particular vanity on my part when I decided to whack off ten years. I also turned myself into a Cancerian instead of the Sagittarian I am. I figured it this way: There could well be an astrologer on the other end who would cast a horoscope, just as witches do, and, if so, it was possible that my accurate birth information might reveal my true motive—reportorial curiosity.

Several weeks went by and I began to wonder if some

sort of "security check" was being made on my application. But no, my suspicions were wrong. The delay, a note later informed me, was due to the fact that new membership cards were being made.

Today, for a total of sixteen dollars, I am a mail-order, card-carrying Satanist.

The card itself, which certifies me as a "Citizen of the Infernal Empire," is a sight to behold. It is scarlet, printed in black and embossed in silver with the symbol of Baphomet, the seal of Satan. My Church literature informs me that, through the ages, this symbol has been called by many names. Among these are: the Goat of Mendes, the Goat of a Thousand Young, the Sabbatic Goat, the Ram of Satan, the Judas Goat and, perhaps most appropriately, the Scapegoat. I was also told that this symbol was used during the Middle Ages by the Knights Templar, an underground Satanic Order which had much economic and political influence during the period.

My membership, among other things, also entitles me to purchase Baphomet pendants as well as special amulets for Power, Health, Love and Wealth at prices ranging from four to ten dollars. There is even an Inverted Cross for those who delight in blasphemy.

Witches tell me they consider LaVey an exhibitionist and a publicity-hound. They are perfectly willing to accept his announced allegiance to the Devil while at the same time considering him some sort of dingbat.

No one wanted to spend any time talking about him. It is not that anyone expressed fear. Rather, one by one, they tended to shrug him off as just another caterer to what Bill Janney has already called "Fad-mad hounds who want to cash in on a new kick."

Joseph Wilson's reaction was the strongest:

"It's like turning ancient wisdom into syphilitic whoredom. But then I believe that about anyone who claims to have occult secrets and sells them under any pretext whatsoever."

Joe Lukach was the most contemptuous:

"Human nature is such that men like to justify their vices and passions, and one means of doing this is to proclaim yourself a Satanist. Actually, they make fools of them-

selves, playing around with powers they think they possess. They are merely metaphysical bunglers. But that does not exonerate them from the debt which will be collected on the astral. Oh, no. The demons they think they control over here, they will meet over there and realize they have no control at all. So, let them have their fun now."

I had asked Herb Sloane about the Satanic concept of the seven astral planes and this is what he told me:

"All of these are earthbound and under the Demiurge's domain. Over and above and beyond that is what I call an eighth plane which is beyond the control of the Creator God. And that is the realm of Satan."

He told me that he knew a woman who had visited that plane.

"Was back about 1942. Her name was Lila," he said. "Now, Sathanas had been in her home and visited her and she had visited him back on that eighth plane.

"Where she visited him was surrounded by a wall of flame and she went right through it like a fish swimming through water. Fire, Sathanas told her, was to keep the curious out."

"How did he look?" I asked.

"He appeared just as we visualize. Dark brown hair, beard, horns and a purple cape. He had a huge censer burning incense and was making supplication."

To whom or to what, I never did find out.

As for Anton LaVey, I never did interview him personally, so I am in no position to judge his motives. I don't doubt for one minute that he is a flamboyant character. The material he sends to his members is voluminous and almost blinding. The pages are different colors and alternate from scarlet to magenta to daffodil and back again.

Joe Lukach told me he saw him on TV once and that the sight cracked him up. He says he laughed so hard he really doesn't remember what he said or did that night. However, Joe's contempt is limited to LaVey's views on religion, not to his showmanship abilities.

Mack contributed the information that he swoops around in a black velvet cape lined with crimson and is known as a former lion tamer.

Beyond that, I know nothing whatsoever about his

background. Since I had decided to find out for myself how easy it would be to join the Church, I was not in a position to ask him for an interview.

That he hit the scene with a publicity coup is a matter of record. In January 1967, he married a couple in a public ceremony in San Francisco. A redhead, nude and reclining, was used as the altar piece. "A marriage made in Hell," he called it.

He, himself, in his newsletter to members, calls this wedding the "vehicle which gained us initial national and international recognition."

He followed that event in June of the same year with the first Satanic baptism of a three-year-old child.

This ceremony, his newsletter said, "caused mixed feelings on the part of the general public. Most felt indignation at what they termed our 'blasphemous exploitation' but could produce no persuasive argument to our contention that the Christian baptism, in which the innocent child is cleansed of 'original sin' and instilled with devastating, unwarranted guilt, is more blasphemous by far than the Satanic baptism, in which the child's unadulterated lust for life is glorified and he is taught to be a proud and positive person."

Monthly Church bulletins keep us posted on his plans for future publicity. When I first "joined the Church," he wrote about the forthcoming publication of the first *Satanic Bible.*

This is now in print, but it does not seem to have made the publishing history he had hoped for.

His views on other witches are also on record:

"White witchcraft groups spout the theory that if you curse a person, it will 'return to you three-fold,' 'come home to roost,' or in some way 'boomerang back to the curser,'" he states. "This is yet another indication of the guilt-ridden philosophy which is held by these neo-pagan, pseudo-Christian groups. These people want to delve into witchcraft, but cannot divorce themselves from the stigma attached to it. Therefore, they call themselves white magicians and base seventy-five percent of their philosophy on the trite and hackneyed tenets of Christianity."

His nine Satanic statements of faith are equally direct:

"1. Satan represents indulgence, instead of abstinence!
"2. Satan represents vital existence, instead of spiritual pipedreams!
"3. Satan represents undefiled wisdom, instead of hypocritical self-defeat!
"4. Satan represents kindness to those who deserve it, instead of love wasted on ingrates!
"5. Satan represents vengeance, instead of turning the other cheek!
"6. Satan represents responsibility to the responsible, instead of concern for psychic vampires!
"7. Satan represents man as just another animal—sometimes better, more often worse than those that walk on all-fours—who, because of his 'divine spiritual and intellectual development,' has become the most vicious animal of all!
"8. Satan represents all of the so-called sins, as they all lead to physical, mental, or emotional gratification!
"9. Satan has been the best friend the Church ever had, as he has kept it in business all these years!"

After reading all that, I felt like muttering mena, mena, mena myself. Instead, I burned my membership card.

15. Black Mass

It is impossible to discuss Santanism or witchcraft without delving into the black mass. Both cults dismiss this infamous ritual as fiction. They do not deny that such rites can be—and probably are—performed. They deny that they conduct them.

"The black mass as something that historically occurred is one of the biggest intellectual frauds ever imposed on the lay public," Rossell Hope Robbins, a leading modern authority, said in his encyclopedic work on witchcraft and demonology which I have already mentioned.

Certainly witches did confess to this practice, just as they confessed to other outrages in the futile hope of either lightening or ending severe torture. As a result, as Robbins also pointed out, "the Satanic mass was virtually a literary creation."

He explains it this way:

"It was only natural that the Inquisitors and the lay witch-hunters who aped them would think of witchcraft in inverse terms to the religion they knew; witchcraft was made a conscious parody of Christianity."

Satanist Herb Sloane told me he considers black masses nothing but "peep shows."

Harold Thomas says that, in his opinion, because the black mass has been widely fictionalized, sometimes a few people will get together and work out some sort of ritual for themselves. He always cautions that since the Catholic Mass is a form of magic, deliberate distortion in itself is dangerous.

Anton LaVey advises his flock that there are many sacred

cows in our current society which warrant protest as much, if not more, than the Christian religion.

Since the black mass is a parody of the Catholic Mass, anyone who has any knowledge of it can figure out a ritual and tailor it to taste. In fiction, it is legendary that the celebrant should be a renegade Catholic priest. But as a game anyone can play, obviously this refinement is not in the least necessary.

As for the rest of it, the main idea is to turn the Catholic Mass into a travesty.

In order to do this, The Lord's Prayer is said backward, interspersed with obsenities. The cross is hung upside down. The wafer, or host, is desecrated in whatever manner appeals to the celebrant. Black candles, instead of white, are burned. One innovation Joe Lukach has heard about is to paint the cross on the soles of the feet of the "priest."

But all that is as passé as *The Merry Widow Waltz*. Of late there's actually been a spate of witchcraft record albums, and since Joe reviews all occult records for *Jazz & Pop* magazine, it's worthwhile to include here part of his review of the *Coven Witchcraft* album that appeared in the July 1970 issue:

"Selections include *Black Sabbath; White Witch of Rose Hall; Coven in Charing Cross; For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge; Pact with Lucifer; Choke, Thirst, Die; Wicked Woman; Dignitaries of Hell; Portrait; Satanic Mass.*

"It took me a while to cut the red Gothic type on the black background of the album to find out who did this charmer.

"Today everyone is busy at playing witch—this group is no exception. It doesn't even have the distinction of being evil, it's just bad (from the point of view of both witchcraft and music).

"Redeeming features are adequate voices and good production. But much too ordinary to live up to the attempted gimmick.

"The music has nothing to do with the lyrics. They go their own separate ways, and the only hint of black magic (which, incidentally, witchcraft is *not*), is the inside photo of the virgin (?) on the altar with a skull covering her box.

"If you have no knowledge of magic and witchcraft,

but merely want to play at feeling 'evil' for a little while, sit with the lyrics in front of you and read them while you listen. You'll never understand the words from the record.

"Unlike most of today's albums, when it's over, you can't recall any of it. There's nothing to remember. Even the chants sound like a bad 1930's horror movie.

"The attempt at drama during the album's *pièce de résistance, Satanic Mass,* gave me a good laugh for 13 minutes, 17 seconds. The initiate didn't sound too sure of her big decision to worship Evil. At times, the 'priest' sounded like Bela Lugosi with an attack of anxiety, and when he instructed the girl to break the crucifix and cast it from her, I'm sure she threw it straight through the nearest stained-glass window."

Joe, on the other hand, rather liked Vincent Price's narrative record on *Witchcraft and Magic.*

"Mr. Price's inimitable style of speech and acute dramatic sense make this a captivating recording," he wrote.

"I find it to be a collection of occult information which is available to everyone through the various Grimoires sold in all occult book stores.

"From my experience, some of the information is inaccurate. This may be a good thing, because I would hate to think of all the black magicians who might be turned loose. Powers are inborn, and when they emerge, I like to see them take a positive direction. A record like this may stimulate an innate ability within some individuals and send them off on the Left-Hand Path (black magic).

"The historical information is very interesting and, to my knowledge, accurate. There are those who will enjoy Mr. Price's vivid description of various tortures used on people accused of witchcraft.

"All in all, this is a good album. But if you feel certain inner stirrings as a result of it, start reading about white magic so that you make no Karmic boo-boos."

I haven't yet mentioned Louise Huebner, sometimes billed as the official witch of Los Angeles. She has written her own book, *Power Through Witchcraft,* and expressed her own views as an individual witch. I am mentioning her now not because she is involved in black masses, but be-

cause she also has cut a record which Joe reviewed for *Jazz & Pop.*

Her album is called *Seduction Through Witchcraft.*

"Want to be a witch?" Joe wrote. "Then don't fall under the spell of this album. On the jacket is a photograph of Louise Huebner looking, I think, her most seductive. Or maybe she just has hay fever. At any rate, I'm sure that there is a powerful spell cast over this photo in order to make you buy.

"If you do, you'll be informed of such untruths as:

" 'Witches are only female.'

" 'It's OK to use blood spells.'

" 'Demons can be summoned and handled very easily. Once you do a spell Louise's way, the demons are "helpless." '

"That's what *you* think, Miss Huebner.

"The album comes on with a voice that sounds as if it belongs to a seventy-five-year-old hag. On top of this, I had the impression it was recorded in the john, but that's the 'mysterious' effect of the echo chamber. I found it hard to believe that the voice belonged to the face on the cover. But it remains the same throughout, so I guess it does.

"I would like to see a true witch come out with an album that eliminates the popular notion that witchcraft means 'let's fuck.'

"I recommend this recording for those whose personal charms are in such bad state that they must run to this sort of magic in order to lure someone to the bedroom. I don't recommend it for those who have a sincere desire to apply their psychic powers to useful, constructive ends.

"There is a strange sort of sexual hangup that happens to frustrated sorceresses, and I can't help but feel that Miss Huebner is in this physical snare.

"Bless you, Louise, and may you evolve to the more spiritual magic for which you evidently have the potential."

But back to the black mass itself.

Witches tell me that the only actual evidence they have as to how it is performed comes from people who have

whipped up such concoctions. I picked up three fragmented stories from them.

In Chicago, a twenty-year-old girl, interested in witchcraft, read about the black mass and drew the conclusion that it was part of the Craft. She found a boyfriend who was willing to work out a ceremony with her. Midway through, they were eventually to report, they found the room overpowered with what they termed "waves of evil so strong you could choke." They completed the rite. And, according to my witch informant (whom they later turned to for help), they are still depressed.

In Detroit, an anthropologist told his college class that gypsies were accomplished in witchcraft. Intrigued, three boys and three girls set out on their own to find one. Eventually they met a fifty-year-old man who assured them he was a gypsy witch. They met one night in his apartment to participate in his version of a black mass. This, they soon learned, simply meant burning black candles and engaging in a gang-bang.

In Philadelphia, a college boy read about demonic invocations and collected a few from a book on magic. As a lark, he teamed up with his current girlfriend and mapped out a mass. They used the attic of his home for the ceremony. Once they were well into the ritual they decided it wasn't such fun after all but completed it from sheer bravado. It was Harold who told me about this one.

"Leaving the attic, the boy fell down the stairs and was cut badly over one eye. The girl has since married him. Now she has discovered she is sterile. What more can I tell you? She will always believe there is a connection."

There seems to be one consistent "must" which runs through all second-hand accounts of the black mass. The abdomen of a nude female serves as the altar piece, and the ceremony ends with the "priest" taking full sexual advantage of such a situation. Whether the other celebrants do or not is a matter for conjecture. And, I assume, the staying power of the altar piece.

Anton LaVey, silent on details which pertain to the black mass, does inform us that a nude woman atop a trapezoidal altar is, if possible, an essential device for a Satanic rite.

"If a woman is used as the altar, she should take her position head pointed south, feet pointed north," he instructs.

"The feet should maybe point east instead?" asked one witch friend of mine with some glee.

Anton LaVey, too, apparently considers the black mass —no matter how it is performed—as old-fashioned as the bustle.

"A modern-day form," he has announced, "might consist of such things as urinating on marijuana, crushing an LSD sugar cube underfoot, hanging a picture of Timothy Leary or a famous Indian guru upside down, or exposing the parallel between the hippie generation and the 'Emperor's New Clothes.'"

16. Voodoo

Of all the forms of witchcraft and magic embedded in the popular imagination, none—not even the black mass—has the exotic hold of voodoo. None arouses more fear. This is probably due in part to many films and novels of the last thirty years. Yet voodoo, like other forms of magic, contains both white as well as black components. Both thrive in America.

"I had always believed that witches belonged to an independent Stone Age cult whose rites were a mixture of superstition and reality and had no connection with any other system," Gerald Gardner wrote in *Witchcraft Today*.

"But," he added, "during my short stay in New Orleans, though I did not succeed in getting into voodoo, I noticed some suspicious resemblances which made me think that voodoo was not solely African in origin but had been compounded in America out of European witchcraft and African mythology."

In America, voodoo took root in the Deep South just about the time the witch craze began to die out in Europe. During the Spanish regime in New Orleans, several years after the last European witch was executed in Germany, voodoo was so rampant that Governor Galvez prohibited the importation of slaves from Martinique because "These Negroes are much too given to voodooism and make the lives of the citizens unsafe."

There are many similarities between witchcraft and voodoo. First of all, both are religions. Second, both religions practice magic. Voodoo, too, can be white magic. Whether both disciplines really did spring from the same original source many thousands of years ago, no one is prepared

to say for certain, but many modern witches are willing to assume that Dr. Gardner was on the right track.

Today, there is much interrelation in terminology. Voodoo, in modern Africa, is commonly referred to as witchcraft. In Africa, the word *vudu* means "God," in some dialects. The translation to "voodoo" seems obvious. Another African word, *obi*, also refers to "vudu," or God. There, again, the word as *obeah* has crossed the ocean and is in common use in the Caribbean.

Voodoo originally reached American shores by two routes: the African slave trade and the Caribbean, mostly Haiti, Jamaica, Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo.

According to the late Lyle Saxon, one of the best-known writers on the Louisiana historical scene, it is likely that from the very beginning of that colony in 1718, African superstitions had given trouble to the colonists. He reported it this way:

"Shiploads of 'brute Negroes' were shipped to Louisiana for the purpose of clearing the ground, building houses, tilling the fields and doing other manual labor. These Negroes were in truth brutes, for the earliest shipments of slaves to the colonies consisted of captives taken in battle on the African coast. It was the custom of cannibal chiefs to sell their prisoners after a battle to the owners of slave ships. These savages, packed into the holds of the vessels, were brought to the coasts of the United States. Many of them died on the way; many committed suicide—and that is a strange thing, as one finds the suicide rate among Negroes very low. But these savages poured into the colony. Here they labored under the lash of their white masters.

"In the swamp near New Orleans, there was a slave farm, a place of horror, where these Negroes were herded and kept until they were tamed or killed. Here they were taught to use rough implements; they were taught to plow and to handle an ax. After a time, they were brought to New Orleans and sold, sometimes by auction and sometimes directly to individuals.

"Now these Negroes, who knew no French and who conducted their dealings with the white man by means of gestures and the few words which they had learned, brought

with them from Africa their old religions, superstitions, charms and spells. And while very early in the history of New Orleans we find these slaves being baptized into the Roman Catholic Church by their masters, it is only natural to believe that Catholicism was but a thin veneer over their own tribal beliefs.

"It was soon after the introduction of Negro slaves that we first hear tales of voodooism. According to the Africans of the Arada nation, the voodoo god signified an all-powerful, supernatural being from whom all events derived their origin. This being was a creature vast and terrible, not altogether unlike the God of the Old Testament. The voodoo god was all powerful, but at the same time, frivolous and malicious. The symbol was a snake, and in this one finds a similarity to phallic worship found among many primitive tribes."

By 1850, voodoo flourished openly in New Orleans, thanks to Marie Laveau. Known to the police as the "conjure woman," she was, at fifteen, one of the most celebrated figures in a city known for colorful characters.

As for Marie herself, little is known of her early life. She was born a free mulatto on February 2, 1827, and was, like other New Orleanians of her time, baptized into the Roman Catholic faith.

In her youth, she was described as a woman of fine physique, having a "Voltairian look," penetrating and taking in everything at a glance.

This Voodoo Queen of New Orleans made no secret of her talents. Instead, with a flair for drama and an eye for publicity, she invited newspapermen and other writers to many of the spectacles she staged. Theoretically, voodoo may have been hush-hush. Under the deft guidance of Marie Laveau, it was a wide-open affair, with the local aristocracy joining the superstitious, unlettered slaves as spectators.

Naturally enough, Marie Laveau herself was highly publicized. According to one writer, Henri Castellanos: "She was essentially a bad woman. To the sin of idolatry, she added that of blasphemy. Though Queen of the Voudous, she exercised the ritual of the original creed so as to make it conform to the adoration of the Virgin and of

other saints. She was the first to popularize Voudouism in New Orleans, inviting members of the press, of the sporting fraternity and others to the yearly festivals held on St. John's Eve (June 24) at some spot near the bayou which bears that name. She also dealt in charms against malefices, and pretended to cure ailments produced by *gris-gris* (little red bags containing powdered brick, yellow ochre, and cayenne pepper, which were supposed to cause untold injury to the recipient) and other criminal devices."

Not all writers agreed that she was an "essentially bad woman." G. William Nott, writing in the *Times Picayune,* reported:

"It will not be amiss to relate the story of an octogenarian mammy, who says that Marie Laveau was not a wicked woman, but much maligned by her enemies, and that what powers she had were used for the good of others, as the following tale will prove.

"A certain wealthy young man in New Orleans, many years ago, had been arrested in connection with a crime, and though his companions were in reality the guilty ones, the blame was laid upon his shoulders. The grief-stricken father immediately sought Marie Laveau, explained to her the circumstances of the case, and offered her a handsome reward if she would obtain his son's release. When the day set for the trial came round, the wily 'voodoo,' after placing three Guinea peppers in her mouth, entered the St. Louis Cathedral, knelt at the altar rail, and was seen to remain in this posture for some time. Leaving the church, she gained admittance to the Cabildo, where the trial was to be held, and depositing the three peppers under the judge's bench, lingered to await developments. After a lengthy deliberation, though the evidence seemed unfavorable to the prisoner, the jury finally made its report, and the judge was heard to pronounce the words, 'Not Guilty.' The joy of the anxious father may well be imagined. His first act was to find Marie Laveau, and as a recompense for her miraculous intervention he gave her the deed to a small cottage. The latter, situated on St. Anne between Rampart and Burgundy, remained her home to the time of her death."

Mr. Nott has also written of Marie Laveau:

"Whether or not the famous Marie Laveau possessed supernatural powers had long been a subject of discussion among the ignorant. More enlightened people have dismissed her as a crass imposter, though not denying for an instant the prestige she held among her own race. However, with her death, 'voudouism' all but disappeared from New Orleans. The little that is practiced today assumes a harmless form; a few chicken bones placed on a door step, a black cross mark on a front board, a bright red powder sprinkled on the *banquette;* these are the last vestiges of the once dreaded *gris-gris.*

"In the Old St. Louis Cemetery on Basin Street is a neat brick tomb, with the following inscription:

Famille Vve. Paris,
née Laveau.

This is all that remains to recall the former greatness of the all powerful Voudou Queen."

Lyle Saxon, writing in 1928, flatly denied that voodoo was dead in New Orleans. In fact, he professed to be an eye-witness at a secret ceremony. He said that most people believed that voodoo had ceased to exist, but because he did not, he had attempted for some ten years to witness the rites for himself.

This is the way he managed it:

First, he was able to convince a Negro friend that he wanted revenge against a rival who had stolen a girlfriend. He was then told that it would cost ten dollars plus expenses and that he must swear to tell no one where he was going, nor would he tell the police in the event there was any trouble. The agreement made, they met at midnight. He describes the scene:

"We had not gone far along a side street when we stopped before a gate in a wall. It opened to his touch, and we found ourselves in an alley, narrow and dark, but open to the sky; the alley opened presently into a courtyard which we traversed, and another gate was opened—a gate

which led into some inner court, long and narrow and overhung by a balcony. It was evident that this court adjoined the slave quarters of the house, which fronted on another street. There was, even in the darkness, an air of dilapidation about the place, and I thought the house to be untenanted. There were several tight-shut batten doors along the wall of the house, and upon one of these, he tapped lightly. Almost instantly it was opened, and a dim light shone through the chink. A whispered consultation, and we were admitted.

"The room was small, and upon the walls there were shelves bored with holes for holding bottles—the old wine room of the house. An oil lamp was burning, the wick turned low; by its light I could see a dozen or more bottles on one of the shelves, dark and new-looking against the dusty walls.

"A woman and a man stood there. She was a light mulatto of about twenty-five years of age, the man was a very black Negro of middle age. The girl would have been pretty had it not been for the deep smallpox scars on her face; she wore a guinea-blue wrapper and was barefoot—a white cloth was tied around her head. The man was a burly fellow, barefoot and wearing only a pair of overalls which left his shoulders and chest bare; his face was mask-like and his eyes half-closed. He stood behind the girl, regarding her narrowly."

From there, Saxon and his escort entered an inner room, lit only by a fire burning in a large open fireplace and one candle set in a glass of water on the mantel. As for the "conjure woman," Saxon continued:

"In the shadow beside the fireplace an old woman sat huddled on the floor; her head was covered with a white *tignon*, and she wore a wrapper of red calico. Beside her, a small table-cloth was spread on the floor; the candle light fell across it, and I could see that it was stiff and clean; there were still creases in the cloth from ironing. Upon the cloth were two plates, one containing meat and bread, the other banked high with oranges and bananas. Three bottles of wine stood at regular intervals; one in the center and the others at diagonal corners of the cloth. Three black candles, unlighted as yet, stood in glasses half-filled with water. A ladle and several spoons were piled together at one side."

Then Saxon got a closeup:

"As we came close she raised her head and looked at me; a strange fat face, full of fine lines like crazed china; one eyebrow was higher than the other—a lax, lewd mouth. But there was dignity there, too, and when she spoke her voice was full and husky."

He was told then to take off his clothes. He was led from the room, stripped and given a faded cotton bathrobe to wear. He then sat down in front of the old woman who put her hands on his head. She began to moan and twitch and shake and to describe his "enemy" as a man who hated him and who would kill him at the first opportunity.

"In the silence of that room," Saxon wrote, "the thing had an air of reality that was amazing. For a moment I forgot that I had invented this rival, and I seemed to see him standing over me, a threatening and baleful figure."

There were about twelve other men and women in the room. While one of them went out for more wine, the mulatto girl came forward with a shapeless piece of black wax. The "conjure woman" kneaded it into the crude shape of a human figure and then, with a knife, drew a few drops of blood from Saxon's arm to mingle with the wax.

She then began to pray, with mounting hysteria, to a statue of St. Anthony.

"She shouted curses, filth, at the statue. She spat wine over its plaster head. Then she flung herself to the floor, beating the flagstones with her fists," Saxon wrote.

"She rose again, saliva dripping from her mouth, staggered, shrieked, and fell to the floor. The Negroes rose and swarmed around her, clutching her head, her arms, her legs and feet. She struggled, fought. Her clothes were ripped half from her fat body. She moaned and her eyes crossed. She quivered and ground her teeth together. She frothed at the mouth. Her limbs grew tense. Her heels beat a tattoo on the floor. It was an epileptic fit, but the Negroes cried out in joy."

Saxon was then given various "things" which had been prepared for him: a small bag containing ashes, hairs from

a white horse's tail, salt and pepper and some crushed dried leaves; a box containing pecans which had been drilled with holes and in which feathers had been inserted; a bundle of feathers, wound around with dried grass.

"In a whisper, I was instructed to throw all of these, one at a time, into the path of my rival. The feather bouquet was to be placed, if possible, in his pillow; the pecans, upon his threshold. When next he left me, I was to throw a pinch of salt after him—then he would never return. An orange from the table was given me. This was for me to eat at my convenience, to make me strong."

During the ritual, a large pot of gumbo had been simmering in a pot hung over the fire. Now the mulatto girl began to ladle out the gumbo into bowls handed to her by the others.

"With her large spoon, she stirred the pot, and lifted out a snake which had been cooked along with the gumbo. Then she let it fall back into the pot again," he reported. "I mustered all my force of will and put the bowl to my lips. My gorge rose, but I managed to swallow a little. They were satisfied."

Then came more wine, louder drumming, wilder dancing. On his hands and knees, Saxon managed to crawl to the door, make his way to the wine room where he found his clothes, dressed and left.

"Horribly sick, I make for the curb and lean against a post. From outside, I can hear nothing of the din from the dancers behind the tight-shut battens of that inner courtyard. Finally the spasm of nausea passes and I stagger along the dim streets, back toward a sane world which tells me that voodoo no longer exists—if it ever existed!"

Since New York City now has the largest concentration of Negroes, Puerto Ricans and other Caribbean natives, it should come as no particular surprise that it has also inherited the mantle of Voodoo Capital of America.

Today in New York, there are many voodoo shops, although they do not hang out their shingles as such. They are known among the Spanish-speaking population as

"botanicas." Many are in Harlem; others are up and down the West Side; still others are scattered around the city, seemingly with no particularly geographical consideration.

Those I have been in are small and crowded, crammed from floor to ceiling with religious objects of all sorts. Crucifixion scenes, many in glowing color, statues of the saints, candles of all sizes and colors, obscure religious tracts (usually in Spanish), hang on every possible inch of space. Medals of every variety fill the showcases, seemingly piled helter-skelter atop each other.

Nor is the clientele exclusively Spanish-speaking. An hour spent in one of these *botanicas,* sitting on a folding chair, cramped against the wall, and you will observe a steady stream of men and women from all walks of life, speaking a variety of tongues—Spanish, Italian, Hungarian—coming and going. They have not come to browse —that would be physically impossible. They have come to buy what they want, and they do so as quickly as possible in order to make room for the next customer.

In voodoo, one of the most prized of all charms is called the *asaváche*. It is actually a seed, native to Santo Domingo. It is round, somewhat the size of a chick pea, and is ebony black and hard.

Some *botanicas* have the genuine product; most, however, have a "reasonable facsimile." Your true voodoo vendor will not attempt to "pass one off" for real but, shrugging, will tell you it's the best they can do and—who knows?—"something may be better than nothing."

The *asaváche,* it is believed, absorbs the waves of an evil force which may emanate toward an object, usually a person. Having absorbed such waves, it then shatters. The *asaváche* is frequently worn on a bracelet, hung as a charm or strung from a chain and worn around the neck. Many Spanish babies—and many other babies who are not—have an *asaváche* pinned to their diapers.

Many wild and wonderful names are given to voodoo oils and ointments. Bat's blood is but one. The City of New York quickly discovered, upon confiscating phials containing "bat's blood," that the mixture was nothing more than water and food coloring.

Fakery? Certainly. Yet, what is commonly called "bat's

blood" among the voodooists is not the real product either —although there is such a thing and it is considered extremely rare. It actually is an anointing oil which has nothing whatsoever to do with a bat, other than to have acquired a spooky name.

Another eerily named ingredient common to voodoo is "graveyard dust." Obviously, there *is* such a thing. But what is most commonly called "graveyard dust" is actually the powdered leaves of mullein. It has been called that for countless years, simply because it carries the dank, musty odor customarily associated with the grave.

When it comes to casting spells, such items as bat's blood and graveyard dust are used in voodoo for revenge and punishment.

High on the other side of the list of voodoo products is "Van Van" oil. This was an original formula worked out by Marie Laveau herself and has been in common usage ever since. It is considered a powerful protection against evil forces.

Van Van oil—along with some fifty or so already prepared other oils, incenses and powders—are easily available from many mail-order houses throughout the United States.

From collecting many such lists, I know that it is possible to purchase a variety of voodoo products, such as "Money Drawing, Uncrossing, Fast Luck, Courage, Victory over Evil, Doves Blood, Black Art, Adam & Eve, Domination, Jinx Removing," just to name a few.

Witches themselves, as a rule, seldom make such purchases. How much sold via mail is authentic, no one is prepared to say. Witches usually make their own.

Mail-order houses frequently push publications as well. The promotion piece which was used to tout one such book promised no less than this:

". . . the most amazing book ever printed—*The Book of Black and White Magic*. This book contains so much valuable information that it is utterly impossible to tell it all here, but we will give you a few of the contents. We will also say that ANYONE WHO WANTS TO LEARN MANY CLOSELY GUARDED SECRETS OF THE OCCULT WORLD SIMPLY *MUST* HAVE THIS BOOK. It

was written by a person who did not allow it to be printed until after her death. She died a rich, rich woman, only because she allegedly used the methods that are in this book. Learn what your lucky numbers are for any undertaking. The author of this wonderful book took this one thing alone and made more than any of us have made in a lifetime. She was said to be more accurate than any person who ever lived about her lucky number. When you read your personal horoscope you will see that it will fit you perfectly. But that's not all—you can get the BIRTHDAY OF ANYONE AND *TELL EXACTLY WHAT KIND OF PERSON THEY ARE*. This one thing alone could be worth its weight in gold. It tells you what your LUCKY DAYS are more truly than any other book. It tells you how to make a *TRUE GAMBLING HAND*. Can you answer the following questions? WHAT IS LUCK? WHAT MUST A PERSON DO WHO IS GOING TO TRIAL? HOW CAN A PERSON BECOME UNCROSSED? HOW CAN I CROSS MY ENEMIES? HOW CAN I RECAPTURE MY LOVER? HOW CAN I GET MY HUSBAND BACK? HOW CAN I PUT MY BUSINESS IN GOOD SHAPE? HOW CAN I HAVE PEACE IN MY HOME? HOW CAN I WIN A LAW SUIT? HOW DO I MAKE A LUCK HAND? HOW CAN I OBTAIN SUCCESS? HOW CAN I GET A JOB? HOW CAN I GET A BETTER JOB? HOW CAN I IMPROVE MY CONDITION? HOW CAN I DRESS A PERSON'S HOME OR BUSINESS FOR SUCCESS AND HAPPINESS? WHAT COLOR CANDLE MUST I BURN FOR PROSPERITY? FOR LOVE? FOR PEACE? FOR REVENGE? FOR WORK? FOR SUCCESS? FOR THE SICK? Perhaps you did not even know that you should burn a certain color of candle for certain things. Do not feel ashamed; many, many people do not know this. When you get this wonderful book in your possession, my friend, you will learn the answer to all of the questions above, plus much, much more. Here is one other important fact: Every item, every ingredient mentioned in this book, we carry in our own shop, especially so that they will be readily available to you, plus the fact that the book of *BLACK AND WHITE MAGIC* explains things in everyday language. *AFTER READING THE*

SECTION ON CARDS, YOU CAN PICK UP A PACK OF CARDS AND READ FOR ANYBODY. But like we stated earlier, we could *never* tell you what all is in this book in one letter. You will have to have it for your very own."

This particular book sold for five dollars, but carried a big discount to regular subscribers to the mail-order service. For one final fillip, a P.S. to the letter offers FREE "secret information on Cuba, Race or Stocks and Bonds."

I have never figured out what that last item really means.

Tempting though it always is, I had learned that it is impossible to send away for all such offers, even in the interest of research. Aside from being deluged with material, most of it shoddy, very little of it is of practical use in probing the mysteries of witchcraft or voodoo.

The Federal Trade Commission and the U.S. Post Office Department, incidentally, do not believe in the occult. Therefore, all such offerings through the mail carry the disclaimer that they are sold as novelties for entertainment purposes only. No claims are made or insinuated that they will allow the user to exercise any supernatural powers. Or so they say.

Rather like the rider which now goes on all cigarette packages:

"Caution: Cigarette smoking may be hazardous to your health."

People continue to buy. Business is thriving.

Voodoo is very much a part of modern American magic.

What of a parent product, African witchcraft?

It has been a mere 150 years since Marie Laveau with her Van Van oil and her *gris-gris* made voodoo a household word in America. Today, some serious-minded Americans are concerned anew about witchcraft—for political reasons, this time.

Sometime during the summer of 1968, Senator Fulbright of Arkansas used his Senate voice to poke fun at a Pentagon-paid study called *"Witchcraft, Sorcery, Magic and other Psychological Phenomena in the Congo and Implications for Military and Paramilitary Operations."*

To which Dr. John S. Foster, Jr., the chief scientist for the Pentagon shot back, "It is dangerously misleading to single out odd-named studies and conclude that all defense research is suspect."

This contretemps was carried by the Associated Press and reported in the *New York Post* on July 16, 1968, under the headline:

Pentagon Puts a Hex
On 'Witchcraft' Ridicule

Dr. Foster prepared a statement for the Senate defense appropriations subcommittee and in his statement pointed out that the study under fire took one week, cost 522 dollars and amounted to eleven pages gleaned from existing information.

It was conducted, said Dr. Foster, "because senior military officers have reported many incidences of dealing with military situations in developing nations where witchcraft, sorcery and magic have played a significant role."

The report was requested by the Department of the Army. They wanted information regarding the purported use of witchcraft, sorcery and magic by insurgent elements in the Republic of the Congo. As the report highlighted: "Magical practices are said to be effective in conditioning dissident elements and their followers to do battle with Government troops. Rebel tribesmen seem to have been persuaded that they can be made magically impervious to Congolese army firepower. Their fear of Government forces has thus been diminished and, conversely, fear of the rebels has grown within Army ranks."

Among the phenomena recognized in the report is the fact that the situation in the Congo does not represent anything new in the history of insurgency insofar as the use of magical practices is concerned.

"History is replete with instances wherein uprisings have been reenforced by magic spells," the report states. "The T'ai P'ing rebellion in China was led by a man who represented himself as the younger brother of Jesus Christ. The Boxer cultists believed that they could cause cannon to fall apart at great distances by psycho-kinetic means. Those

who took to Mau Mau oaths in Kenya were taught that oath violation would be instantly lethal. African history contains numerous other examples of similar phenomena (the 'Maji-Maji' rebellion in Tanganyika, the Makombe uprising in Portuguese East Africa, etc.). Current problems in the Congo as well as the Lumpa uprising in Northern Rhodesia today exemplify the same superstitious manifestations."

What can be done about it?

This particular study concludes:

"In the Congo, as elsewhere in black Africa, there is every reason to believe that disciplined troops, proficient in marksmanship, and led by competent officers, can handily dispel most notions of magical invulnerability. It is quite true that the raising of such a force may pose more problems in the Congo than in some other areas, but the problem is by no means insoluble."

Some four months after the Department of Defense published its findings, the Associated Press carried a feature story by Kenneth L. Whiting, datelined Johannesburg, South Africa.

The headline in the November 2, 1968, *Milwaukee Journal* read:

Even in Space-Age Africa
Witchcraft is Still Important

Mr. Whiting's story began:

"That old black magic continues to weave its spell in space-age Africa.

"Africans know it as juju or muti medicine, voodoo or plain old witchcraft. But whether they are detribalized city dwellers or live in rural kraals—compounds—it plays a key role in their lives.

"Witch doctors have been described as the 'African psychiatrists,' to whom blacks can take their anxieties and get a measure of assurance and certainty in life. Most form an integral part of African religious systems based on ancestor worship.

"Africans are preoccupied with spirits, many of which represent dead members of their tribe. Ancestral spirits are carefully graded in importance and many witch doctors fill the role of priests in trying to keep a man in good with the spirits.

"Experts say another—dangerous—class of witch doctors work with 'black magic' to instill fear in those who consult them."

The article, obviously carefully researched, then goes on to outline the various ways and means by which such African magic is worked.

I round-robined both of these AP stories along to two witches I know who are serving in the Armed Forces—not as draftees, but as career men.

Both were delighted, particularly by the stand of Dr. Foster and his defense of the possibility that the practice of magic did, indeed, exist, like it or not.

One of them, a lieutenant now in Vietnam, took longer to respond, as might be expected. When he did, he demonstrated that the witch underground is improving all the time. He had also heard of the suit which President Nixon's former law firm had filed in Puerto Rico. The suit itself was not handled in secrecy; neither had it been publicized to any great extent. His knowledge of it was no great surprise.

But what he did have to say startled me considerably. It was this:

"Frankly, I was never an admirer of Mr. Nixon. But let me say this. Perhaps he had no personal knowledge of what his firm was up to when they filed that suit. I don't believe it myself because I am a witch and I do not believe in coincidence. I believe in magic. By that one action of his alone—whether he consciously knew what he was involved in or not—I believe that he has a very good chance to go down in American history as one of our great Presidents—on a par with George Washington."

I was, to put it mildly, mystified. The lieutenant then added that, in his papers at home, to which he had no immediate access, of course, was an obscure little document written by a Robert Allen Campbell called "Our Flag."

He suggested that I try to find a copy since it would explain in detail what he meant.

I checked out the history of the U.S. Flag with Laurence Tower, executive secretary of the U.S. Flag Foundation in New York. This twenty-year-old non-profit organization has devoted the majority of its time and effort to tracing the history of the designing of our flag. They state:

"The flag of the United States, popularly called the Stars and Stripes and Old Glory, originated as a result of a resolution offered by the Marine Committee of the Second Continental Congress at Philadelphia and adopted June 14, 1777. It read:

" 'Resolved: that the flag of the United States be made of thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation.' "

Who designed it, no one knows. Our pet fable that it was the work of one Betsy Ross has long been discredited, although there seems to be no question that she was commissioned to produce them.

According to Mr. Tower, there seems little doubt that the flag was not "designed" but that it "evolved." "Some mystery, perhaps," he says. "But magic? Unlikely." The Foundation had not heard of the pamphlet by Mr. Campbell.

I eventually found it reprinted in *An Encyclopedic Outline of Masonic, Hermetic, Qabbistic and Rosicrucian Symbolical Philosophy,* by Manly P. Hall, which was published by the Philosophical Research Society, Inc., of Los Angeles. I don't think it goes very far in proving that our national figures have really used magic, but it is a charming, off-beat story and I am repeating it for that reason.

"In his admirable little treatise 'Our Flag,' Robert Allen Campbell revives the details of an obscure, but most important, episode of American history—the designing of the Colonial Flag of 1775. The account involved a mysterious man concerning whom no information is available other than that he was on familiar terms with both General George Washington and Dr. Benjamin Franklin. The following description of him is taken from Campbell's treatise.

" 'Little seems to have been known concerning this old gentleman; and in the materials from which this account is compiled his name is not even once mentioned, for he is uniformly spoken of or referred to as "the Professor." He was evidently far beyond his threescore and ten years; and he often referred to historical events of more than a century previous just as if he had been a living witness of their occurrence; still he was erect, vigorous and active . . . hale, hearty, and clear-minded . . . as strong and energetic every way as in the prime of his life. He was tall, of fine figure, perfectly easy, and very dignified in his manner; being at once courteous, gracious and commanding. He was for those times and considering the customs of the Colonists, very peculiar in his method of living; for he ate no flesh, fowl or fish; he never used for food any green thing, any roots or anything unripe; he drank no liquor, wine or ale, but confined his diet to cereals and their products, fruits that were ripened on the stem in the sun, nuts, mild tea and the sweets of honey, sugar or molasses.

" 'He was well educated, highly cultivated, of extensive as well as varied information, and very studious.

" 'By something more than a mere coincidence the committee appointed by the Colonial Congress to design a flag accepted an invitation to be guests, while in Cambridge, of the same family with which the Professor was staying. It was here that General Washington joined them for the purpose of deciding upon a fitting emblem. By the signs which passed between them it was evident that both Washington and Franklin recognized the Professor and by unanimous approval he was invited to become an active member of the committee. During the proceedings which followed, the Professor was treated with the most profound respect and all of his suggestions immediately acted upon. He submitted a pattern which he considered symbolically appropriate for the new flag, and this was unhesitatingly accepted by the other six members of the committee, who voted that the arrangement suggested by the Professor be forthwith adopted. After the episode of the flag the Professor quietly vanished, and nothing further is known concerning him.' "

Today American witches are convinced that their religion is so interwoven into the fabric of American history that some of them are now discussing the possibilities of setting up an entire new system which will become, eventually, "American Tradition."

It would be, they visualize, a nonsecret religion based on the Old Religion. It would contain the ritual similarities that all the different types in the United States now have—Celtic, English, Italian, Spanish, etc. Even the religious aspects of voodoo would be included. None of the witches connected with this undertaking pretend that this is the "one and only." The main purpose, instead, is to offer a form of the Old Religion to all Americans who have no other way to join an already established coven. They may feel free to change or add to any of the recommended rituals, using different names if they so desire. But it will primarily be a means of expression for those who need it.

They do not doubt that many Americans are actively engaged in such a search for a religion that will provide them with individual satisfactions which they find lacking in organized religions. Again, they are not seeking converts. They believe that, at long last, the time is ripe for witchcraft to emerge from obscurity and secrecy. They hope that America is the place where this renewal of faith will occur.

As individual citizens, they deplore the many rank social injustices we have spawned. Yet, they never lose sight of the fact that, by witch standards, we are a nation in infancy with ample opportunity to grow into wisdom. As witches, they are grateful that America did not join the great witch-hunt, a phase of their history that some refer to as "The Time of the Burnings."

Except, of course, for those six months of terror back in 1692 which dramatist Arthur Miller has immortalized in his play *The Crucible.*

It happened in the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

And for that, witches say, the British must accept the blame.

17. New England Nightmare

"The New England panic at Salem was but a last bright flicker of the ghastly glare which had so long made hideous the European night."

So wrote George Lincoln Burr in 1890 in *The Literature of Witchcraft.*

The nightmare of Salem began with boredom.

To survive in Salem Village, Massachusetts, in the winter of 1692 required a strong back and a blind faith in the better life to come. The Indians were on the warpath, Colonial taxes were intolerable, the winter especially bitter and recreation confined to two Sunday sessions of three hours each, listening to the Reverend Samuel Parris place the woes of his captive parishioners squarely where he believed they belonged—at the feet of the Devil.

In the kitchen of the Parris home was a West Indian Negro slave, Tituba. Although she had been baptized in the Christian faith, she was also very well versed in voodoo. She was a naturally gifted storyteller and, quite naturally, a group of preadolescent and teen-age girls gravitated to her side to listen to her exotic stories.

Precisely when or why, during that drab winter of 1692, Elizabeth, the nine-year-old daughter of the Reverend Parris of Salem Village began to have "fits" is unknown and, today, unimportant. When the village physician could not diagnose her "strange symptoms and unexplained affliction," he pronounced her "bewitched" and the witch-hunt, American style, was on.

With the minister's daughter, her cousin Abigail Wil-

liams, age eleven, and their friend Ann Putnam, twelve, as ringleaders, the greatest spasm of youthful rebellion against the adult world so far recorded in American history was launched.

The technique of these seventeenth-century delinquents was simplicity itself. Their theatrics improved with practice and they had plenty of it. When confronted by the. men and women they chose to accuse of bewitching them, they fell into screaming fits, subsided long enough to swear out depositions and then shrieked so loudly in court when their victims appeared in self-defense that the hearings were frequently halted because the testimony could not be heard.

Three outstanding citizens of the day were named to conduct the preliminary hearings, since the Colony at that time had no provisions for judge and jury. Samuel Sewall, John Hathorne and Jonathan Corwin were three such "magistrates" who heard—or tried to hear—the evidence when the preliminary hearings were held. All were intelligent, well-educated men with an unassailable belief that witches were agents of the Devil.

Some of the more level-headed citizens of Salem Village refused to be taken in by the witch bitches. John Proctor was one of the critics. Deploring the proceedings, he indignantly suggested that the girls have the Devil beaten out of *them* and threatened to thrash his servant girl, twenty-year-old Mary Warren, who was showing signs of "possession."

Mary defected from the group of young girls and promptly found herself accused of witchcraft by her former cohorts. Quickly realizing her own dilemma, she rescinded her confession and rejoined them.

John Proctor's wife was one who had been tapped as a victim.

When he went to Court to attend his wife during her examination on the charge of witchcraft, he was so disagreeable to the prosecuting witnesses that he was accused by them on the spot of the same crime.

It was eighteen-year-old Elizabeth Booth who swore out the deposition against him. It reads:

"The deposition of Elizabeth Booth, aged eighteen years, who testifieth and saith that since I have been afflicted, I have been most grievously tormented by my neighbor, John Proctor, senior, or his appearance. Also I have seen John Proctor, senior, or his appearance most grievously torment and afflict Mary Walcott, Mercy Lewis, and Ann Putnam, junior, by pinching, twisting and almost choking them."

He was found guilty and thrown in prison to await trial.

Of record is a letter he wrote to a group of ministers in Boston while he was in the Salem prison, pleading for the trials to be moved from Salem to Boston. Dated July 23, 1692, it reads in part:

"My son, William Proctor, when he was examined, because he would not confess that he was guilty, when he was innocent, they tied him neck and heels till the blood gushed out at his nose, and would have kept him so twenty-four hours if one, more merciful than the rest, had not taken pity on him and caused him to be unbound.

"These actions are very like the Popish cruelties. They have already undone us in our estates and that will not serve their terms without our innocent blood. If it cannot be granted that we can have our trials in Boston, we humbly beg that you would endeavor to have these magistrates changed."

According to Charles W. Upham, whose two-volume work *Salem Witchcraft* is still considered the definitive history on the subject, all of John Proctor's property was attached. Everything was taken from his house. His family, consisting of eleven children, were left destitute and even the food that was being prepared for their dinner was carried away by the sheriff. After conviction, Proctor petitioned for a little more time to live, but it was denied him.

John Proctor was the eighth to hang.

George Jacobs, Sr., like John Proctor, also had a mind and a voice of his own. He was an old man, about eighty, extremely tall but also infirm. He got about by supporting himself on two canes. His hair was white and worn in flowing locks.

He met the accusations—and the accusers—head-on.

"Well, let us hear who are they and what are they."

He laughed at the performances of the girls and said, "Because I am falsely accused, Your Worships all of you, do you think this is true?"

Later in the examination, growing angry, he thundered, "You tax me for a wizard; you may as well tax me for a buzzard. I have done no harm."

In the Essex Institute in Salem is a drawing by T. H. Mattison in which the artist tries to convey a spectator's view of a witchcraft trial.

It depicts George Jacobs, Sr., defending himself on bended knee. It is a scene of hysteria and pandemonium. One girl on the left-hand side is flopped out in what could only be a dead faint. In the center two others, not quite so supine, have also hit the floor. In the center is a girl, about fifteen, who is supposed to have been Jacobs' granddaughter. She was one who testified against him.

On the day of the trial, these girls were already on hand in the courtroom. When Jacobs was brought in, they all at once "fell into the most grievous fits and screechings." Asked by the magistrates "Is this the man that hurts you?" they managed to answer "This is the man" before passing out. One, Mercy Lewis, had this to add: "He used to come with two staves (canes) and beat me with one of them."

To which George Jacobs could only respond:

"Why, it is false. I know not of it any more than a child that was born tonight."

He was the ninth to hang.

The lunacy lasted six months. In September 1692, it subsided as swiftly as it had begun in March, probably from sheer community exhaustion.

During those six months, nineteen men and women had been hanged, one was pressed to death and over 150 were accused and imprisoned.

Other victims of this American piety craze ranged from a bedridden seventy-one-year-old matriarch who understood little of the proceedings to a four-year-old girl who understood nothing.

The woman, Rebecca Nurse, whose most poignant statement in her own defense was "I have naught but old age" was the fifth to hang.

The child, Dorcas Good, whose comments are not on

record, was imprisoned with her mother, Sarah, who was the second to hang. Dorcas, held in chains for an undetermined number of months, was eventually freed.

Eighty-year-old Giles Cory, unique among the accused, contemptuously refused to plead at all and chose instead to "stand mute." Under English law, the accused had to plead either guilty or not guilty. The penalty for such refusal was *peine forte et dure*, slow crushing with weights until the victim agreed—or died.

Cory was taken to an open field, stripped bare and flung on his back while boulders were piled on his body until his tongue protruded. The sheriff, with his cane, poked it back in again and the pressing continued until Giles Cory was dead. It took two days.

Three days later, on what turned out to be the last—but busiest—day on Gallows Hill in Salem, Cory's wife, Martha, was the first to be hanged for witchcraft. On that Thursday, September 22, 1692, eight men and women were executed, bringing the total to nineteen.

None were hanged because they admitted their guilt, but because they denied it. Fifty-five of the accused confessed to witchcraft and were promptly set free. Tituba was among the first to escape the hangman. Using her lively imagination, she spun her tales of witches on brooms and the Devil in the guise of a hog. She languished in jail for a year and was then sold again into slavery to pay for her prison expenses. Her ultimate fate is lost to history.

Puritan justice had other peculiar quirks. Even when acquitted, the accused were forced to pay for their maintenance while they were held in jail awaiting trial. As for those who were hanged, the relatives were required to pay the hangman's fee.

The bodies were denied proper burial. They were cut down and tossed into a crevice at the bottom of Gallows Hill.

Joe Lukach and I made a pilgrimage.

When you enter the city limits of Salem by automobile today, a white sign put up by the Chamber of Commerce greets you with the words boldly lettered in black and

red: "Welcome to Witch City." On the sign is a black stenciled silhouette of a witch flying through the air on a broom. Sometimes the copy on these Chamber of Commerce signs varies. Another reads, "Welcome to Salem, the Heart of the North Shore. Follow the Historic Trail—19 Historic Sites." The witch rides her broom on these, too.

An occasional billboard, erected by private contractors, advertises "Homes for Sale in Witchcraft Heights."

Other signs, which the Chamber of Commerce obviously did not sponsor, are tacked up at random, usually on the front of an abandoned building, on a telephone pole or on a roadside tree.

These appear to be the work of irate citizens; they are crudely lettered in heavy crayon or poster paint. The wording on them varies, too, but the message is the same, referring to water pollution. "Salem Stinks," the simplest ones announce bluntly.

Modern Salem is a town of 39,000, according to the 1960 U.S. Census. It probably has not grown much since then, if at all, because it is caught in a bind between three other towns—Beverly, Peabody and Danvers.

Danvers is now the name given to old Salem Village. Today it is a thriving industrial-residential community of 22,000. In the old village days, it was a township of about 300 square miles with a population of less than 100 householders. The Rebecca Nurse (sometimes the name appears as Nourse) home was one of these. A prize example of seventeenth-century architecture, it still stands on its original site and has been restored by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

Salem as a retail center has gone downhill since the advent of shopping centers. The biggest business today is Parker Brothers, manufacturers of games, such as Monopoly. There are also a fair number of small plastics and electronics firms.

Salem's days of glory during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when it was a great port, are far in the past. Some blame the decline on the shallowness of the harbor; others are willing to speculate that a Black Curse has been laid on Salem in retribution for the witch-hunt.

It is difficult to ascertain how profitable or large tourist

business is today. The House of the Seven Gables, built by John Turner in 1668, is the background of the famous novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne, a descendant of Judge John Hathorne. (The "w" slipped into the name during the intervening 150 years.) Overlooking Salem Harbor, the house draws some 75,000 visitors a year.

What is now Salem Common in the heart of town was once common land—a town swamp with ponds and hills and blueberries—and was set aside as a training field in 1685. It was filled in many years ago and is now solid ground.

When you drive around the Common and turn at Hawthorne Boulevard into Essex Street, you enter the main street of town. Many of the shops which line both sides of this one-way street, a long-gone Indian trail, have "For Rent" signs in their windows.

Follow it for ten or so blocks and you pass the Witch House to your right. This was the home of Judge Jonathan Corwin. Here, preliminary examinations of many of the accused were said to have taken place.

Closed and shuttered for many years, it was purchased by the City of Salem, restored, and is now open to the public. It is a clapboard gabled house with a heavy overhang, somberly and completely painted black. Judge Corwin's wealth and power increased after the trials, but his reputation did not. Rumor has it that upon his death he was held in such contempt that he was buried in the cellar of this house for fear that his grave would be desecrated.

A few blocks past the Witch House, a turn to the left will take you up a winding road to a craggy hill, its edges rimmed with wispy trees. The weeds are anywhere from three to four feet tall and rough foot paths lead to the top. Some natives say they have "always been told" that this is actually Gallows Hill.

A few blocks beyond this smaller hill, however, a much taller one towers and this, today, is called Gallows Hill Park. It is planted with locust trees and is a children's playground. There are no historical markers on either.

Extensive digging has never been done on either hill; no real evidence has ever been produced that would ir-

revocably prove that one—or the other—is the site.

Because it is—or was—generally believed that witches were executed on the highest ground available, sentiment favors the playground.

At Peabody, you pass the great Northshore Shopping Center. Advertised as a "must" on every vacationer's list, it boasts free parking for 8,000 cars, 60 air-conditioned stores and services, nine restaurants, snack bars and cocktail lounges.

It abuts the property which is believed to be the land farmed by Giles Cory before September 1692.

The farmhouse of Rebecca Nurse stands high on a hill on the outskirts of Danvers. In August, driving up the gravel road that winds on a gentle grade through the twelve acres remaining of the original three hundred, the lower meadows bloom with wildly purple loosestrife, commonly called rainbow weed or purple willow herb.

Multicolored hollyhocks in full bloom lean against the side of the pitch-roofed house, a classic New England saltbox built around a central chimney with a lean-to on the back. Stained a deep barn red, it has since weathered to a rusty brown. Over the heavy front door, studded with nails as a protection against Indian arrows, is a sundial which antedates the building.

The only furniture in the house that belonged to Rebecca is a hand-hewn armchair, built by her husband, Francis, and this is now in the upstairs bedroom they shared. It is set into an alcove behind a thick glass panel and escapes notice until the lights which illuminate the alcove are switched on. The impact is startling when the chair, seemingly from nowhere, leaps into your line of vision.

To the right of the house is a smaller gravel road, almost impassable, which leads to the family burial ground. It is known that the five stalwart sons of Rebecca Nurse went down to Salem in a canoe—in those years, water ran to their property—on that midnight of the day when she was put to death, cut her body down and, with muffled oars, rowed her back to her home.

No headstone marks her final resting place. It is known only that she is buried nearby.

The George Jacobs home stood until a few years ago.

Today his property is the site of a low-cost housing development. A bowling alley is at the corner.

Of all the victims, he is the only one whose place of burial was ever determined.

Tradition has descended through the family that his body was retrieved, strapped to the back of a horse by a young grandson and brought back to his farm to be buried beneath the shade of his own trees.

His canes are on display at the Essex Institute, the historical museum in Salem. Where the bones of George Jacobs now rest since the housing project was built is a matter for conjecture.

Except for the trial records, little else remains of that New England panic.

Few who were responsible ever conceded their error.

Ten years after the hangings, Judge Samuel Sewall confessed the guilt of the Court. After declaring his desire to take the "blame and shame of it" and "asking pardon of men," he observed an annual day of personal humiliation for the rest of his life. For over thirty years, he attempted to atone for his "mortal error."

John Hathorne never did.

The Reverend Samuel Parris?

Driven from his parish by the incessant quarreling of his parishioners, he died in obscure poverty.

On the neatly clipped lawn of the First Church of Danvers, a historical marker reads:

"To this Church, rent by the Witchcraft frenzy, came in 1697 the Reverend Joseph Green, age twenty-two. He induced the mischief makers to confess, reconciled the factions, established the first public school and became noted for his skill at hunting game and his generous hospitality."

Nine years after the arrival of the Reverend Green, Ann Putnam—by then twenty-six—made a public confession in the church. Among other things, she said:

"It was a great delusion of Satan that deceived me in that sad time, whereby I justly fear I have been instrumental, with others, though ignorantly and unwittingly, to bring upon myself and this land, the guilt of innocent blood."

She was the only witch bitch to show contrition.

Four years later, she was dead.

In today's Salem, a modern confession in the form of a publicity handout proclaims:

"In regard to witches, we still have them. They have green eyes and blond hair and instead of broomsticks, they ride convertibles. Come and see for yourself."

We left. Salem had hopelessly depressed a Manhattan witch, and as far as he was concerned, the pilgrimage was a psychic flop.

We decided to drive up the coast to Maine for a brief holiday. Between us, we had run out of cash, except for the few dollars necessary to get us back to New York, but this presented no serious problem.

As I always do when traveling, I had packed my checkbook and carried a check guarantee card from the Chase Manhattan Bank.

Joe had brought along some herbs and other potions "just in case we meet a sorcerer in Salem," he explained before we left New York. He hadn't used them. On the spur of the moment he decided to whip up a charm for me.

Rummaging around in his suitcase, he hauled out a small plastic container—the ordinary sort you would see on any kitchen shelf. This one was filled with sallow-looking dried leaves and bits of stems which I did not recognize. Joe told me it was an herb called St. John's Wort, commonly used in magic.

Then he settled down at the motel desk and went to work while I hovered over his shoulder.

"Do you have any muslin?" he asked, after a moment's thought.

"Well . . ." I started thinking of my possible supplies of muslin.

"Never mind," he replied. He stood up, pulled out a small pair of scissors from his pants pocket, turned the pocket inside out and clipped it off. Then he sat down again and cut the newly acquired muslin into a rectangle.

He fingered the St. John's Wort into the center of the muslin as if he were assembling a tea bag.

Satisfied at last by the distribution of the herb, he glanced up again and inquired, "Do you have any string?"

"Well . . ." I began to think about that.

"Never mind," he repeated. "It's not important to the charm either. I'll make some."

He raveled out a few long threads from the remnants of the pocket, tied them together to fashion a string and bound the St. John's Wort into a tidy package.

Silently now, Joe fetched two brown glass bottles from his room.

Picking up the small one that looked as if it might have one time held nose drops, Joe told me that it contained holy water.

"But of a different kind than you would imagine," he assured me. "Not from churches. This is a mixture of water collected from three different natural springs," he said.

"Where?" I asked.

"A witch's secret."

With that, he carefully measured three drops with an eyedropper on the muslin-wrapped herb, set it gently aside and, glancing up again, asked this time, "Do you have any white blotting paper?"

"Well . . ." I began.

"Never mind. White Kleenex will do."

He darted another glance at me and now his eyes were sparkling like emeralds.

"I keep telling you that witches are an improvising lot," he said. And back to work he went.

Now he produced a second brown bottle, this one of a size for cough syrup. Curious, I took it from his hand and read the label clearly written in his neat hand: "Magnetic Fluid."

"And this?" I asked.

"That's the guts of the charm."

Now he sat back in his chair, relaxed, and suggested I draw up another beside him while he explained it to me.

"That bottle holds a special formula which, as you see, we call the "Magnetic Fluid," he said. "It is made up of several ingredients vital to magic."

"Like what?"

"The four elements—earth, air, fire and water."

"Is the formula always the same?"

"Basically, yes. There are major variations from witch to witch. Has to. One of the ingredients is the witch's own blood."

I took the bottle from him and sniffed at it.

"Why," I said, "it smells like plastic!"

"You're not far wrong," Joe said, smiling. "We call the ether the 'plastic ether.' Now watch," he continued.

Taking the bottle from me, he took another eyedropper and carefully measured several drops onto the Kleenex-which-should-have-been-white-blotting-paper.

As it dried, he sat back again and went on with his explanation.

"When the Magnetic Fluid is completely dry," he said softly, "I will concentrate my desire into the fluid on the paper. When the time is fit, I will release my concentrated thought out into the ether through whichever one of the four elements I have chosen. My desire will enter the astral plane and the element will hold it there. When you need it, it will take effect immediately. If you don't need it, it will sit there like a lump."

"For how long?"

"It will remain in the astral plane for as long as I send it there to do its job. The spell will be very precisely worded to do a specific thing for a specific length of time."

"And then?"

"And then it will self-destruct and you will have nothing left but an old piece of a pants pocket wrapped around some worthless herbs."

By this time the Magnetic Fluid had dried to pale yellow stains on the Kleenex.

Joe gave me one last, searching look and turned his full attention back to the charm.

While I sat very quietly, he put the tips of the fingers of both hands on top of it and while they rested there, closed his eyes and concentrated silently with an intensity that was almost visible.

For sixty seconds he remained that way—and then it was over.

Joe pushed aside the charm, picked up the Kleenex, and striking a match, held it over the ashtray until it burned to

ashes. Then he flushed it all away in the bathroom.

I put the charm in my purse and we packed and left for Maine.

Heading north we drove the toll road until we got to Portsmouth, New Hampshire. We drove right on into town and I pulled into the parking lot of the first bank we spotted. While Joe stayed in the car, I went in, sought out a vice-president, introduced myself, presented him with all my identification and started to write out a check for him to initial for payment.

Much to my amazement, I quickly discovered that this routine, which I had always found acceptable in New York, San Francisco and Miami Beach, among other places, simply does *not* work in New England.

He explained courteously—but firmly—that he could not honor a personal check no matter how gold-plated the credentials of the presenter.

He explained that this was not only an unalterable policy of his particular bank, it was also the policy of banks throughout Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Maine.

When I asked "Why?" he told me that there had been so much forgery going on over the past months that they, along with other banks, had even discontinued cashing money orders the week before.

Then I asked for advice. He said the simplest thing to do was to keep right on going to Portland and when I checked into a hotel there, just to wire my New York bank for funds. He volunteered that I was only one of some dozen or so people who came through the door every day with the same problem.

I went back to the car, climbed in and repeated the conversation to Joe. As we drove off toward Portland, Joe asked, "Where's the charm?"

"In my purse," I said.

"Take it out and tuck it into your bra" was *his* advice, and as soon as we hit a red light, I did as he suggested. I began to catch on.

We didn't drive straight to Portland. We stopped at the next bank I spotted and, again, I went in and asked for the vice-president.

His refusal and his explanation were exactly the same—

so exact that you almost expected to hear him announce, "This is a recording."

This time, when we reached the point where I asked "Why?" I casually brushed my hand against the front of my dress, looked at him, smiled, and repeated the question because, quite suddenly, his "record" had faltered.

Nor did the needle slip back into the groove. Instead, as if by impulse, he asked to see my credentials, studied them in an abstract way as if he had never seen a credit card before and then made his own decision.

"In your case," he said slowly, "we'll make an exception."

When I got back to the car, Joe was sitting there grinning.

"How much did you get?" he asked.

"Fifty," I said.

"Good! Let's go."

We had a wonderful holiday.

That initial fifty dollars was not enough, of course, but we sent no wires to the Chase Manhattan and we had no financial problems. Feeling like the Bonnie and Clyde of the occult world, we cashed modest checks whenever the money ran low, and the game was always the same. A polite but firm refusal from a bank official, my "why" carefully timed to a touch of my well-concealed charm, a sudden reversal of policy and money handed through the teller's cage, accompanied by the words "In your case, we are making an exception."

Belief—or knowledge—as Joe had always insisted from the beginning, makes no difference in magic.

Among my souvenirs are canceled checks from such out-of-the-way places as Kittery, Maine, Rockport, Massachusetts and—yes—Salem. For good measure.

Joe's depression dissipated; he and I decided that we wanted to have some of the silver witch charms, tie-tacks, pins and key rings we had noticed for sale in Salem, so we drove through again on the way back to New York and allowed enough time to cash a final check to pay for them.

That midnight, we were sitting by the side of a pool at a motel in the shadow of Salem, talking quietly of its tragedies and sipping a last scotch and water.

We were quite alone.

With no warning, Joe got up, slipped off his rings and put them, along with his glasses, on the diving board. Fully clothed, he kicked off his shoes and dived into the pool.

Back in the witch-hunt days, trial by water was considered a mild procedure. It was a common belief that witches feared water and could not swim. The hapless victim was bound hand and foot and thrown into the nearest body of water. If, as most often happened, he promptly sank to the bottom and drowned, he was proclaimed innocent and buried in hallowed ground.

If, however, he floated, he was pronounced guilty, hauled out, dried off, and burned to a crisp.

When Joe hit the water, instinctively I jumped up, slipped off my shoes, too, ran to the edge and braced myself to leap in and haul him out by the beard if necessary.

He broke to the surface in the middle of the pool, shook the water from his hair and, using a perfect crawl, easily swam back to the deep end where I was still poised, barefoot.

"Witches," he told me gleefully as he tread water, "*can* swim!"

With that, he pulled me in, too, and we paddled peacefully about for twenty minutes or so. I can't be sure of how long it was—I was still wearing my watch.

As we dripped our way back to our rooms, Joe laughed softly.

"Your charm," he said, "self-destructed you know. And returned to the element where it was originally sent—water."

That night I threw away a soggy little muslin bag, adrip with St. John's Wort.

Somewhere in New England, near Salem, is the biggest pot of herbal tea ever brewed by a witch.

Blessed Be.

Epilogue

This is a ritual of self-blessing. It should be performed during the new moon, but it is not limited to that phase. Need, not season, determines the performance. There is real power in the self-blessing; it should be used in time of need and not done promiscuously.

The purpose of the ritual is to bring the individual into closer contact with the Godhead. It can be used also as a minor dedication, when a person who desires dedication has no one who can dedicate him. The self-blessing ritual may be used also as a minor exorcism, to banish any evil influences that may have formed around the person. It may be performed by any person upon himself, at his desire.

Perform the ritual in a quiet place, free of distractions, and nude. You will need the following:

1. Salt, about one-quarter teaspoon
2. Wine, about an ounce
3. Water, about one-half ounce
4. Candle, votive or other

The result of the ritual is a feeling of peace and calm. It is desirable that the participant bask in the afterglow so that he may meditate and understand that he has called the attention of the Godhead to himself, asking to grow closer to the Godhead both in goals and in wisdom.

When you are ready to begin, sprinkle the salt on the floor and stand on it, lighting the candle. Let the warmth of the candle be absorbed into the body. Mix the water into the wine, meditating upon your reason for performing the self-blessing.

Read the following aloud:

Bless me, Mother, for I am thy child.

Dip the fingers of the right hand into the mixed water and wine and anoint the eyes.

Blessed be my eyes, that I may see Thy path.

Anoint the nose.

Blessed be my nose, that I may breathe Thy essence.

Anoint the mouth.

Blessed be my mouth, that I may speak of Thee.

Anoint the breast.

Blessed be my breast, that I may be faithful in my works.

Anoint the loins.

Blessed be my loins, which bring forth the life of man as Thou has brought forth all creation.

Anoint the feet.

Blessed by my feet, that I may walk in Thy ways.

You personally know at least one witch!

Maybe two or three. Maybe a whole coven. Witches are engineers, housewives, lawyers, politicians, movie producers, and there are many thousands in America. They look and act like ordinary people, but they are not. They follow ancient gods and goddesses and secret magical rituals and they ignore conventional morality and behavior. Some witches are Satanists and inflict great harm, but most American witches are "white" or beneficent, and are united in a hidden, underground network that covers the nation.

All share in the daily practice of magic, and most initiate their children into their strange and wonderful world.

Susan Roberts is the first American writer to be invited into the homes and private counsels of the witch world. This fascinating, unique and completely authentic book is the result.

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